

20¢

PUBLISHED
TWICE A MONTH

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FEB. 1, 1926

NO. 174

In this Issue
"THE SCORPION'S HEART"
by S. CARLETON

MADGE KENNEDY
tells of
"THE MOST MYSTERIOUS
HAPPENING IN MY LIFE"



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Volume VIII

FEBRUARY 1, 1926

Number 2

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Subscription Price—Domestic, single copy, 20 cents; yearly subscription, \$4.00; Canada \$4.25; foreign \$4.50.

Published twice a month by MYSTERY MAGAZINE COMPANY, 1133 Broadway, New York City. LOUIS F. WILZIN, Proprietor. Entered as second-class matter December 24, 1925, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

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All remittances should be sent by Express Money Order, Post Office Order, Check, or Draft, to insure safety. Manuscripts must be accompanied by sufficient postage for return. The publishers disclaim all responsibility for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts.

Around the Corner



O PLAY strictly true to form, a magazine with the name of Mystery should be as mysterious as possible about the future. But it is doubtful if this interpretation of its name and aims, if applied too literally, would be popular with our readers who are naturally curious to know, at all times, what is around the corner.

And around the MYSTERY MAGAZINE corner—which is, of course, our next number, out February 15—will be found several things worth knowing about in advance.

Dale Collins, who seems to be acquiring more and more popularity by the minute, will be represented by the first of a series of short stories retailing the adventures of *Peter Lamb*.

Mary and Florence Nash—famous sisters of the stage and co-stars in "A Lady's Virtue"—will tell Bide Dudley and readers of MYSTERY MAGAZINE about "The Most Mysterious Happening in Our Lives."

Victor Lauriston, whose stories have a way of their own, will be responsible for a complete novelette called "Sight and Sound."

And the Percival C. Wren novel, "Who Rideth Alone," will continue on its exciting and mysterious way. Incidentally, if you have not already begun to read this story of Wren's, you are missing what will surely be one of the outstanding books of the present publishing season.

Finally, it is important to remember that MYSTERY MAGAZINE is published twice a month, on the first and fifteenth.

The Scorpion's Heart

By S. CARLETON

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I

ROSE RED

IT SOUNDS perfectly foolish now, but when I went to France to live with grandmother at Chateau Venizel the last person I ever thought could concern me was a man in blue and silver!

What did seem to concern me was that, though grandmother had insisted I should come and console her declining years, she didn't really need me, and that Honorine, her maid, a woman with a flat, viper face who managed everything in the house and grandmother, too, was positively rude to me and watched me as if I were a burglar.

I don't know that it was in the house, though, so much as out-of-doors. I could never even walk down to the garden without Honorine fussing after me, or else telling grandmother it was not *convenable* for a young girl to walk about alone.

And then, of course, grandmother would send for me to come in.

I never complained to grandmother about it, because she had been the Marquise de Venizel for so long that she never remembered being an American girl called Antoinette Mary Hamilton—which was sensible when she had to be a French marquise and live in an exquisite inconvenient sixteenth-century chateau. But for me,

who was Antoinette Mary Hamilton fifty years younger, and brought up in America and the world generally, to do exactly what I pleased, it was different. And, even leaving out Honorine, I didn't enjoy Venizel.

It was lovely, but it was deadly, deadly dull.

No one ever came, nothing ever happened, and we did exactly the same thing every day, and that horrid chained-together look was exactly how it felt while we were doing it.

I'd brought my own mare, Kentucky Nancy, with me from America, but all the good I got out of even her was a ride every morning with Henri, grandmother's own groom. The rest of the time I embroidered chemises.

Grandmother never did anything but exist beautifully in the big chateau, where the floors were so polished that she had to wear rubbers for fear she would tumble down. Personally, I could have put those floors to a better use, for ever since Panleva stayed with father and me at Palm Beach I'd been devoted to Russian dancing, but, before grandmother, I bottled that up.

Only by the time we'd had dinner, about six, without even a good walk all day, I simply had to slip out-of-doors and do all my dances by myself before the bottling process made me scream. And that was how I hap-

pened to be in the Venizel garden the evening this story truly begins.

GRANDMOTHER and Honorine—who really mattered more—thought I was sitting on the stiff terrace in front of the chateau, with a fence of orange-trees in tubs between me and all I could see of the world, which was nothing but miles of cornfields and beet-root gardens, with a corner of our own woods sticking out into them, beside the long white road that ran by to the narrow old bridge over the Aisne river.

Nothing but carts ever happened on that road. But anything might have happened in the Venizel garden, such as hearing some one sing "The night has a thousand eyes" in a perfect baritone, or, well, anything!

It was heavenly when I slipped out into it that evening in the pale blue dusk that comes just before dark at Venizel. The Provence roses it was crammed with looked like pale velvet and smelled like nothing earthly, and I was so glad to be out in them alone that I caught up both ends of my white sash and did nearly half of the Russian butterfly dance Panleva taught me before I saw something that brought me up dead still.

It sounds silly when I say it was nothing at all but a star, low down in the southern sky, only it was one I'd never seen in my life. And it was rose-red!

The color of it truly gave me a sort of shock. It was so absolutely glorious, so much more like a ruby and a rose-topaz mixed than a star, that somehow it made me feel dreadfully homesick and quiet as I stared at it; and I did a perfectly idiotic thing out there alone in the Venizel garden. I said out loud to that star:

"I wish that things may stop being dull at Venizel; that I get rid of Honorine, and that you will turn out to be my very own star, and bring some-

one to Venizel who really wants me!"

If I'd known what that wish was going to bring me—at first, anyhow—I suppose I would have dropped on my knees and prayed to be let off. But I didn't know. I made a curtsy to that rose-colored star instead; and it was just when I was floating up from it in my best Panleva manner that I saw another new thing in the Venizel garden. Only this time it was a man!

I COULD just see him, standing half blotted out by a black bunch of laurels at the bottom of the garden. I couldn't think who on earth he was, only I knew, like you do know things that startle you, that he was a gentleman. Even in the pale blue dark he looked rather a splendid high-headed sort of person. He was looking straight at me, because I could see the gleam of his eyes, and suddenly I believed I saw him smile. Naturally, I was simply blazing. No one had any business in the Venizel garden, and I wasn't going to have a strange man come there to watch me dance and hear me talk to a star, and smile!

I said, "*Cela prend mon chevre!*" which was the way I talked French then, and I marched straight down to the laurel bush to say it again. Only when I got there, well, there was no man! There was just the laurel bush, black and empty under my rose-colored star.

I was idiotically scared. Of course, I might have fancied things and the strange man might never have been there, but I knew better, for two reasons. One was that you could slip through the middle of that laurel and disappear, because I'd done it from Honorine, and the other was that my toe stubbed on a tiny coil of fine, fine wire that we didn't have at Venizel—and a queer looking thing I didn't recognize for anything—and I knew

the man who had watched me must have dropped them both before he slid away.

I slid away myself, quite slowly, till I got to the garden gate. Then I ran, though I don't know why on earth I was so frightened, till I ran hard into Henri, grandmother's groom. He was standing below the chateau terrace waiting for me; but, if I thought it was to ask if I had seen anyone strange in the garden, it wasn't. He only said as quietly as if it were perfectly usual for me to race out of nowhere and stand panting at him:

Mademoiselle, the war has begun!"

CHAPTER II

SCORPIONS

WELL, I knew we were waiting for what everyone knows by heart now.

The thing that hit me wasn't so much the awfulness of the Germans being on the road to Paris with Venizel on their straight path, but what Henri had really come to say. He and all the other men-servants, who were all reservists, were to join their regimental depots at dawn, and before noon every horse in our stables would be requisitioned by the French government.

I made one grab at Henri's arm. I said: "You don't mean my Nancy? They won't take my Nancy to be killed?"

And Henri said that was what he had come to tell me!

I looked at him, and he nodded. So I went into the house and said good-night to grandmother, who was having a sort of parliament with the other men-servants and Honorine, and she thought I went to bed.

Instead Henri and I crept down to the stables and stole horses from the French government. We hid Kentucky Nancy under a disused lime-

kiln, with plenty of food, and I put in an old white horse, too, because I knew Nancy would shout and give herself away if she were left alone.

I was so nervous that she might be missed and asked about—which she wasn't—that I entirely forgot the strange man I had seen in our garden, and that I ought to tell grandmother about him at once.

GRANDMOTHER was really too busy to be talked to, though, in seeing to everything and arranging for the women servants to do the men's work; and for a whole fortnight I thought that was all there was going to be about it, and that war wasn't coming near Venizel after all. It was like being struck by lightning the night we heard the guns and saw the sky-line lit with burning houses. For all we knew Venizel might be next, but grandmother had no earthly idea of refugeeing, whatever happened; and naturally I had none, because I couldn't leave my hidden horses.

I helped put some blankets and mattresses in our cellars, for fear that if we got shelled we would have to go there, though personally I thought even one shell would probably bring the old chateau down on us, and that we'd be better out in the lime-kiln with Kentucky Nancy. But when I went to grandmother's room in the morning to tell her so, she was looking out of the window over the Venizel fields. Something in the set of her head turned my blood to pins and needles. I said: "What is it?"

Grandmother said, "*Scorpions!*" more as if she were speaking to herself than answering me. "Oh, if we could only warn them!"

I didn't see anything one bit like scorpions. I saw hundreds and hundreds of gray soldiers slipping into the dark wood that stuck out on the right of our yellow fields, and melting

into the beet-root gardens on the left, as if they went into the ground. Then there was nothing to see but the narrow, empty, white road. It never dawned on me that the gray men were Germans, and I said, "Warn who?"

"Our men," grandmother snapped, "and the English! Can't you hear they are fighting over there?" And, of course, I did hear as she pointed across the fields and the peaceful yellow sunshine to a far-off line I'd thought was haze. "These Germans have out-flanked them; they'll get them!"

"D'ye mean I ought to run over and say so?"

I held in a horrid sort of shiver, but grandmother clutched me to her. The far-off haze was nearing us, breaking into color, becoming alive.

And it was men in khaki, men in blue with red breeches, horses galloping with guns, and then gorgeous, gorgeous French cavalry with silver cuirasses and shining black-plumed helmets, because at the first of the war the French wore those things, and just fought in anything they happened to have on.

I don't know how they came. It seemed all in one minute that the guns swung round and were firing into the wood, and the running men were blotted into the harvest-high corn, pouring rifle bullets out of it like hail. From somewhere in the smoke the cavalry fused into a shining mass and charged into the beet-fields, and whatever was there broke and screamed and fell and ran. It was the horses that made me sick, but grandmother looked only at the men.

"They work well in that sun," she said, exactly as if they were haymakers. "All the shade they get is from those bursts of German shell."

It was true. All across the fields were purple patches of shade from

the yellow smoke that floated like balloons against the blue sky, the bursting shrapnel of a German battery hidden somewhere behind our wood.

It struck me as odd that not one shell fell on Chateau Venizel. But I couldn't keep on thinking about it. The men in our fields, khaki English, blue and red and silver French, were losing what they'd gained, and fighting and retreating up to us and past us. We watched them do it all that livelong day. When they were gone we saw what they'd left behind.

I will never put down what that was, because this is not a war story. Only the cornfields were not all yellow any more, and the patches of color in them screamed and whined and some of them moved. I remembered my heavy revolver that grandmother would have a fit if she saw, and I didn't care if she had ten. I yelped:

"The horses! I have to go and shoot the horses! I can't bear to see them suffer."

"Women have to bear things when men fight and die for them." Grandmother sat quite still. "Besides, do you wish to die, too? Fountains of earth do not usually spring out of beet-fields. There are British howitzers somewhere covering that retreat."

CHAPTER III

BLUE AND SILVER

I WASN'T pretending to be brave. I sat down with my head in my hands, till suddenly I felt so queer that I knew the awful guns of that awful afternoon had stopped, and that my queer feeling was just dead silence.

"I'm going now, grandmother," I whispered, and I knew she heard only because she rose to go with me.

Honorine and some of the other women were waiting on the terrace with bandages and things, and we all went down the avenue into the Venizel fields.

Fortunately, you don't feel sick when you're doing things. I shot horses and never even gulped, though I did thank God some were dead when I found them. Most of the men were dead, too, but we did what we could for the rest.

Some of them could walk; the farm women carried the others up into our empty stables. All of them were French and English, and we had just laid them all on our hay when I remembered the wood and the beet-root fields full of wounded Germans.

I sort of melted out of the stables and turned back to those horrid fields alone just after sunset. But in the middle of the very first field I jerked up so short that I slid. In front of me, among the French dead we'd left in the corn, was a live man. And he was not a man who'd been there an hour ago!

Even kneeling on the ground with his back to me, I knew this. He had on the blue and silver the French cavalry still wore in the first days of the war. One of his legs trailed behind him queerly, but he didn't seem to know it.

He was staring down at a dead French soldier and rummaging with one hand in the poor thing's blouse. He pulled a bit of paper out of it carefully; and then he must have heard me behind him, for he swung around. But I didn't say anything. Something caught in my throat and took my breath away.

He was the most gorgeous, splendid sight I ever saw!

He was tall and high-headed under his shining silver helmet with its little gold aigrette, its big scarlet pompons, and long black plume. Round his throat was a scarlet gorget, and

his dented silver cuirasse glimmered at me over his powder-blue cavalry jacket. His red breeches were stuffed into high black boots, and there was something recklessly, insolently smart about him for all his stains of dust and cornstalks. But it was his face I looked at and his eyes, for it was there the reckless splendor of him came in.

For one good minute we stared at each other, I with my arms full of things for the German wounded, and the man in blue and silver slowly crushing up in one hand the little bit of paper he had taken from a dead man's breast. Then something seemed to snap between us.

"You!" said the man in blue and silver exactly as if he knew me, and in perfectly good American, though I didn't think of that till afterward. "You! Get back to the chateau at once! This isn't any place for you!"

I was so astonished that I just stared.

The man in blue and silver sat down sideways, as if he couldn't kneel on one knee any longer. But it was a huge hole and a horrid dark wetness on the other knee of his red breeches that I was looking at.

"Are you—oh, are you badly hurt?" The very look of that knee made me squeak, and then I hauled myself together. "How did you ever get here?"

He stopped looking as if he were going to faint, and pointed to where grandmother and I had last seen the shining French cavalry, and said he'd crawled from over there, and that he was all right except for a smashed leg and could manage for himself if I would have the goodness to go back to the chateau!

Whether he were badly wounded or not, he sounded cross, just plain cross.

I said: "I don't happen to be going back. I'm going over there!" I point-

ed across the beet-fields to the horrid dark woods beyond them.

"What? To help Germans?"

He jerked his helmeted head back to stare at me, and once more his face kept me still. It was very dark, with sunburn over its paleness, and it was other things besides. His eyes were clear hazel gray, with wonderful black lashes. Yet somehow he looked just a hard, handsome devil as he stared at me, and my heart gave a horrid jog. I mumbled something about supposing men could suffer even if they were Germans, and that I was going, anyway. But from the way he looked at me I knew I wouldn't.

"It's quite impossible, even if I would allow you to do it," he announced calmly. "Putting aside that a girl could not assist those wounded alone, there's no need, either. Those men have doctors, dressing-stations, everything that we"—he hesitated on it—"we French had not. If you doubt it, look!"

He pointed to the wood, and I felt a fool. There were lanterns moving in the black of it like fireflies, and I knew all he said was true and the best thing I could do was to go home. But as I turned, his competent voice stopped me.

"I won't have you go back alone, even if you are American and independent! If you'll save me the pain of reaching for that rifle, I'll make a crutch of it and see you to the cha-teau."

He pointed to a rifle on the ground. It was almost under the hand of the dead man over whom he had been bending when I arrived, and I remembered the paper I had seen him take from the stained blouse. I said curiously:

"Did you know him?"

"Not so well as I thought," said the man in blue and silver shortly, but he never mentioned the bit of paper.

He swayed over and reached the rifle for himself, made sure it was empty, rose with the butt of it under his arm, and scowled so furiously that I thought he'd hurt his leg. But he was only staring at the wood where the German lanterns were hunting the wounded, and I saw a blue light flash out there, twice.

I didn't see why that should have made him start, but I didn't ask any questions, because the strange French cavalryman's face frightened me of them, and of him.

If I'd dared I would have run on ahead and left him, but, though I knew it was idiotic, I didn't dare. I just walked, and he limped beside me. It had been a day I couldn't even bear to remember; and suddenly it felt an awfully lonely thing to be an American girl stuck in France in the middle of a war, and I didn't see how I was going to live through it.

"I'm American, and this isn't my war," I gulped, because of course it wasn't then.

CHAPTER IV

HONORINE

THE man in blue and silver took a snapshot glance at me between limps. If he knew I was crying he didn't say so. He only stopped in the Venizel avenue as if he were thinking.

"It's necessary, now," he said slowly, speaking of the war, "except for some poor little light-hearted children, who never should have seen it. But you and I may as well talk of something else. There is still happiness in the world, and love, and stars in the sky, as usual since Creation. There, if you have patience with a superstition, is *my* star!"

He gave a little lift of his really splendid head, and for one second I truly could not speak. There, just

rising, so that it stood exactly over him, was my big rose-colored star, shining down on the two of us.

It wasn't the star that kept me quiet, but as I stared at it past the man in blue and silver I caught the set of his head over his slewed shoulder, and I knew him!

There had been no blue and silver about him then, but all the same he was just the man who had watched me out of the laurestinus bush the evening I first knew there would be war! I would have died before I said so, or that his rose-colored star was my star, and he had no right to it. But I did burst out with:

"Your star? How do you mean, it's yours?"

"Just that I was born under it." He looked from me to it where he leaned on the rifle. "The constellation is the Scorpion, if it interests you, and my red star is Antares, the Scorpion's Heart."

"The Scorpion's heart!" It was that minute the awful thought about him first came to me, and my own heart turned straight over. "Do you mean you're a German?" I squeaked before I knew it; and then I realized what I was saying to a man in a French uniform. "I—it was the scorpion—grandmother called the Germans 'scorpions' this morning," I explained in a weak, tailing-out sort of way. I knew it sounded futile. But the man in blue and silver only took a calm stare at me.

"If you mean 'am I a German spy?'" he returned dryly, "I am merely a French cavalryman without a horse. But as for scorpions, Mademoiselle, there are nine different kinds of them, chiefly distinguished by their color, some being yellow, brown or ash-colored, others black, white and gray. The sting of the latter is very painful, and can cause death."

"That's Duffin's Natural History!" I gasped scornfully.

"Exactly. I happen to have learned some of my lessons in America," he retorted. "I trust your grandmother, in calling our enemies scorpions, distinguished them as the gray ones, because all the ugly insects are not devoid of some virtues and the constellation named after them certainly is not. Magnetic heat is always with the Scorpio born; he is a faithful friend, Mademoiselle, and a good enemy, and in his heart, as in that star"—he pointed to the glowing rose-colored point—"is always the vital fire of life."

BUT I couldn't answer one word. Grandmother had told me awful things about German spies, and that I must be prepared to find them everywhere, and one thing after another about the man in blue and silver hit me like a hammer.

He had been in our garden long before we saw a sign of war. I'd seen him steal a paper from a dead Frenchman. The blue light in our wood had meant something to him if it hadn't to me, and he could be nothing on earth but a German spy!

I thought I'd give him one chance to be honest about it, so I pulled out the bit of wire and the queer-looking thing he'd dropped in our garden—I kept them in my pocket, I don't know why—and I said: "Do you know what these are?"

The next second I thought I was going to be sick. He answered perfectly easily that one was a bit of German telephone wire and the other a broken valve from some sort of wireless, but he glared at both of them like a wolf, and then at me.

He never asked where I had picked them up, or even looked as if he thought I could suspect him. But I was finished.

I simply had to make myself remember he was probably bleeding to

death while he stood by me telling lies about himself and his star, or I would never have taken him home. But I wasn't going to let myself be sorry for him.

I just *had* to remember he was a German spy, so I said, "Scorpion, scorpion, scorpion!" to myself to make me do it, and suddenly I was thankful to see even Honorine tearing down the avenue with a lantern in her hand.

She didn't need it a bit, but she said she'd brought it to look for me, because she'd been terrified; and she certainly did jerk up with a horribly frightened look when she saw me with a strange French officer.

She took hold of him and helped him up to our stable. I couldn't have touched him.

After I'd watched Honorine's lantern shining from the stable door for about ten minutes I decided I'd better go and say a few plain truths to the Scorpion, because I couldn't call him anything else to myself, even if I'd known what his real name was.

When I got to the stable I saw I couldn't. He was lying in the straw by the lantern in what looked like a dead faint, and Honorine had his cuirasse off him and was feeling his heart. She didn't see me across the lantern, but I saw her grab at his hand, that was all slack, and take out of it the same piece of paper I'd seen him steal from a dead Frenchman.

It wasn't that that kept me silent. It was the awful jump Honorine gave as she glanced at it.

There couldn't have been much to read, because the thing was tiny, but all the same I knew that paper had given Honorine the surprise of her life. She touched the Scorpion quite differently, too, as she slipped it inside his shirt; and I remembered I didn't like her. I spoke before she saw me and as unexpectedly as I could:

"What was that paper, Honorine?"

The start was out of Honorine, whatever it had been. She just answered that it was a note belonging to poor *monsieur*, who was terribly wounded above one knee.

He was; so badly that I didn't see how he had ever limped up our avenue. Even Honorine looked sick as she fussed with iodine and water, but the Scorpion never came out of his faint, even enough to moan—which suited me. For while Honorine went off for more bandages, I took that paper out of the Scorpion's shirt and hid it in my own.

I don't know why I did this. I wanted to look at it, just as Honorine had done, but of course no one but a servant could do that. I folded it up when I went into the house and put it in a little bag I wear around my neck. Then I went to bed. I was just dropping.

IT wasn't for three days that I knew what real tiredness was.

We couldn't get any news of what was happening, though the guns never stopped and made you keep lifting your head to listen if they were coming nearer, no matter what you were doing. And I did everything, from carrying water to my hidden horses to helping bury the dead.

I was so dog-tired by the third night that when I went down to the stable I almost wept, though that was truly more with worry, because I couldn't find a sign of the secret wireless I was sure the Scorpion had installed around our garden or somewhere.

We had had news of the fighting at last. The French and English were beaten back everywhere, and the Germans, in force, were beyond Venizel, and likely to sack it.

I knew, too, the first thing they'd sack would be my Kentucky Nancy,

that loved me like a dog; but it wasn't altogether Nancy I was crying about; it was the wounded men in our stable. Some of them were better, but there were others I couldn't even bear to think of, and I had to see them, every day; men with their legs off and their eyes out, agonized and dying for want of the doctors we could not get and the anesthetics we didn't have.

Even the Scorpion, who wasn't nearly the worst, just lay on his straw and never spoke. I hated him, of course, because I was sure he was a German spy, but that night I couldn't stand it. He had been so perfectly splendid looking in his blue and silver out in the cornfield, and he was so dreadfully long and slack lying in the Venizel stable holding his eyes shut. I took one stare at him, with Honorine beside me, and said:

"Honorine, I'm going to ride somewhere for a doctor!"

I realized she knew all about my hidden horses, if grandmother didn't, because she was the horrid, quiet kind of servant who always knows everything. But even Honorine looked up queerly. She said, after a minute, that she didn't see where I could go. The Germans were in a wood between us and the nearest town on the north; so I interrupted and said I was going the other way—south. Honorine drew her lips in between her teeth and looked at the Scorpion lying with his eyes shut.

"I have a fear that would not be safe," she began, and the Scorpion opened his eyes and cut her off like a knife.

"Safe!" he exclaimed in French. "There are Germans on the direct road! I forbid Mademoiselle to go!"

Honorine said "Yes," and hushed him up like a baby, but presently she said something to me, very quick and low. There was one town I could go to

—there is no sense of putting in its name, because I never got to it or even near it—by a back way, never going near the high road. Only, of course, Mademoiselle could not possibly go alone at night.

I said:

"No, of course not."

Then I slipped straight down to the lime-kiln and saddled Kentucky Nancy and went.

CHAPTER V

THE TURRET

THE lane to the Soissons road was just at one side of the lime-kiln, so I did not have to pass the stable where the Scorpion lay by the open door, and I knew that even Honorine hadn't seen me start, though the night was simply ghastly clear.

Out in the back lanes I didn't mind so much, but at the only place where I had to cross the Soissons road toward my village, the road lay as smooth and white as a map, and I felt as if I showed for miles on it.

I would have been terrified of that and everything else, if I hadn't been too busy with Kentucky Nancy. She was very fresh after all those days in the lime-kiln, and she took it out in waltzing on one spot, and absolutely would not go.

I was pretty close to despair with her, when I heard another horse on the dead run behind me, and, before I even realized I'd been followed, the old white horse I'd left in the lime-kiln shot out of the lanes into the starlight on the Soissons road.

He was in his halter and stable rug, and on him was the Scorpion—bare-headed and with his leg in bandages, just as he must have crawled out of the stable. How he ever got on the white horse I don't know, much less how he was staying on, for it must

have been torture. He looked like a splendid, furious devil.

My heart turned over. This time it was with temper, for of course I knew the reason that Kentucky Nancy would not go on. She had heard her old friend the white horse coming behind her. And if I hadn't thought the Scorpion was in agony I mightn't have—but of course I would have come for the other poor men. I said:

"How dared you take that horse and follow me, besides irritating your wound? Go back!"

The Scorpion put his hand on my bridle without even looking at me. He said:

"Wait! Keep that mare still. My wound's nothing, but you can't go on if I go back! You're right, those men must have a doctor."

The reason he wasn't looking at me was that he was staring down the open, white road at a black patch of woods on one side of it. He put his hand in his shirt and pulled out something so suddenly that I wondered if it was a revolver.

Then three blue flashes came out of the thing in his hand, and I saw it was only an electric torch with a blue glass on it, and I was struck dumb. I remembered the blue lights in the Venizel wood and I knew, for certain, now, that the Scorpion was a spy.

I didn't know what to do. I couldn't even breathe. There was no answering blue light in the wood ahead of us, if that was what the Scorpion expected, but he seemed satisfied without it, for he nodded to himself. Then he said:

"Go on! Don't gallop! Walk!"

I WENT. I was so angry at his daring to follow me, and being able to ride when I thought he was in agony, and so angry about his being a spy—about which I should have told grandmother long ago—that I wouldn't speak.

The Scorpion didn't, either. He rose beside me, just rocking forward on the white horse's neck. Passing the dark wood, Nancy shied frightfully, but I couldn't see a thing nor hear a sound. The Scorpion was whistling, a sort of tuneless dog-whistle, and he had never taken his hand off my bridle. I told him to, and he didn't answer for nearly half a mile. Then he said:

"Don't you see I can't *talk*? Get on!" in a voice that sent Kentucky Nancy off like a catapulted stone.

I never looked behind to see if the old white horse kept up, for I knew he couldn't. It wasn't till long after that I realized I rode south by that red star the Scorpion had called his, listening all the time for the clop of his horse behind me. I never saw a living soul, till suddenly I rode around a corner, almost into a lighted house, and a French Red Cross motor ambulance, with a fat man in a Red Cross cap standing by it.

I slid off Nancy and grabbed his arm. Before I could even begin to say anything, the old white horse tore up to us and stopped with a slide, and the Scorpion pitched off him in a dead faint.

It took me ten minutes to convince that Red Cross man that I hadn't just brought him in a wounded man, though he was an American working for the French and ought to have been brighter. I nearly hugged him when I found out who he was, and that he was bright enough when he did understand about me and the Scorpion.

He said he was looking for a base for his first-aid stations, and that Venizel would just fill the bill. The only other thing he stopped to say, before he put the Scorpion into one of the wagons he had with his traction chassis and started straight off, was that there were Germans in a wood whom I seemed to have miraculously

escaped, and that I must not go back across the Soissons road.

I just nodded. If I should have told him about a spy and a blue light, I didn't; but it wasn't that I was grateful to the Scorpion, though I knew he had saved me and my Nancy. I hated him so, for being what he was, that I'd sooner he had let us be shot!

I thought grandmother would be furious with me when the Red Cross man told her what I'd done, but all she said was that the blessed Archangel Michael had protected me; and I couldn't tell even her it had been only the Scorpion, and that he was a spy.

I knew I ought to, but something seemed to choke me when I as much as tried to say his name. Not that any of us really knew it. Grandmother said she thought his face reminded her of someone, but anyone's face might do that in a dim stable. She'd only seen him once, anyhow, because we didn't need to toil over the *blessés* so much now that the fat Red Cross man had charge of them.

I made up my mind to see him quietly as soon as he was fit, and say he must get dressed in his gorgeous, lying uniform and leave Venizel before I was compelled to tell about him. But when I went to the stable to do it, he wasn't there, and the Red Cross man told me he'd had him carried into the house.

I knew Honorine couldn't guess he was a spy, in spite of whatever she'd read on his bit of paper the night he came, or she would have told grandmother long ago. I found out where he was, from her, but I couldn't very well go into his bedroom, principally because he'd locked his door.

He had told Honorine he didn't feel well enough to see grandmother, and I was glad he had that much shame. I couldn't really feel much pride in his staying in his room, for it wasn't only grandmother he was avoiding.

A lot of wounded French officers had dribbled to the chateau from different places and the ones who were able were usually prowling around. Half of me thought the Scorpion didn't want to face them, and the other half wondered that a really earnest spy should lose such an opportunity of hearing things. Remembering the Scorpion's competent ways, I wondered, too, if he really needed to hear anything wounded officers could tell him. And the next day I stopped wondering altogether.

SOMETHING had happened, somewhere; we didn't know what. But once more we could hear the most dreadful fighting. This time it wasn't so near that we had to see it, but it was bad enough to know that the awful guns meant a frightful battle somewhere.

Grandmother and the wounded officers were certain there was going to be a French victory, but somehow I couldn't be so sure. Whatever the French guns were doing, they didn't seem to be able to silence the German battery that was still hidden behind our wood. The shells from it kept flying over us and bursting like yellow and white woolly bears.

I was in the *salon* window watching them, and thinking what I'd thought the first day I saw them, that none of them dropped even near Chateau Venizel; and I tell you my heart was sick, for I knew now the reason was they wouldn't risk killing a perfectly good German spy. Naturally I supposed the Scorpion must have been around the chateau all that first day, when he'd pretended he was out fighting, and suddenly I heard one of the crippled French officers speak in a voice that went straight down my spine.

"We probably have a spy here, or that battery would not be shooting as

it is. Someone's signaling to it from this house. If we could catch him we might help to save France!"

My hands turned ice-cold. I don't know why. The Scorpion was nothing to me, except that I hated him. I was afraid I might see the French officers kill him like a spy in a history book, and I thought I'd rather help to save France myself.

I slipped out, though I needn't have worried, for they weren't noticing me, and up to the Scorpion's room. But he wasn't there. He wasn't in the garden, whether he had a hidden wireless there or not, and he wasn't in the stable. I didn't know where he could be.

I was coming back, perfectly desperate, when I suddenly knew where the Scorpion was! From the chateau, high up in a turret window in a dead line with the German battery, I saw a tiny flash, like a heliograph, twice and then twice again. What it was I didn't know; but I could have killed myself for letting it happen.

I was indoors and up the turret stairs before I knew I'd moved, and in a lumber-room at the head of them—just as I knew he would be—was the Scorpion!

Honorine had been taken in when she said he wasn't feeling well. He looked perfectly well, except for his crutch. He was all dressed, too, in his own shirt and somebody else's old trousers.

If I'd known how that was going to matter to me I believe I would have run, even then, and brought him his battered shining cuirasse and his blood-stained red breeches. But all I thought of was what I should have known long ago. Grandmother's turret! The turret was just a wireless room, with the aerials and everything else hidden inside its pepperbox roof that had had a wide square cut out of it, like a skylight!

CHAPTER VI

THE STEEL-GRAY FLOOD

THE Scorpion wasn't sending or listening, or of course I should have heard him long ago. He wasn't even near the wireless.

He was standing close by the window I'd seen the flashes come out of, with a queer mirror thing in his hand. What for, when he had the wireless, I couldn't see.

Whether I understood it or not, it was deadly bold to signal from Chateau Venizel to the Germans. But there was no boldness in the Scorpion's face when he saw me in the turret-room door. He turned perfectly livid. Then he made me a quick, forbidding sign with his head.

But I was past sign. I went in.

I said: "Do you know how long I've known we had a spy in this house?"

"No," said the Scorpion. He looked past me in a furious sort of way and I saw Honorine, beside the wireless table, between me and the door.

I thought she'd followed me up from downstairs, and if I'd meant to tell the Scorpion I knew he was a spy I hadn't meant to tell a servant. I blazed out at her to go, and the Scorpion snapped at her to stay. Honorine never answered either of us. She stood staring from the wireless; she was beside the mirror thing in the Scorpion's hand, her hard French face set stolid. He spoke to her, rather slowly:

"Till tonight—and for Mademoiselle's sake—no longer!" and she just melted out through the turret-room door.

The Scorpion looked after her without taking any notice of me, and spoke to himself, absently:

"That's not safe! But it will have to do for half an hour." Then he turned round; and I never saw him look so young or so angry or so

hard: "What possessed you to let out that about a spy? Do you mean you knew?"

"Knew? I knew everything!" I was angrier than he was. I meant to have him out of Venizel if I had to load him and his crutch up in a cart and drive him off myself with the old white horse. I looked from the mirror thing in the Scorpion's hand to the wireless in our own turret. "All I don't know is how you got that thing set up in our house, and why you're not sending on it now you've got it, instead of heliographing!"

The Scorpion laughed.

"You wouldn't," was all he said; but he looked more sullen and deadly furious than I ever knew a man could. "Do you mean that I am a spy?"

"Do I mean——" I glared at him and the wireless. "I've known you were, ever since the night you first watched me in our garden, and left a valve out of that thing behind you with what you said was German telephone wire! You didn't think I recognized you in the cornfield, but I did. I wasn't even surprised when I saw you steal a paper from a dead French soldier, nor at your knowing what the blue flashlights in our wood meant! I hated you"—we stood facing each other like two tigers, he in his ragged clothes and me in dirty white linen, because no one had any time to do any washing—"hated you all the time, even when you saved my life with that same blue light out on the Soissons road!"

"Even then?" I didn't think he could get any whiter when I nodded, but he did. "I don't know that I saved your life; I may have saved your mare's. But permit me to add that your Red Cross doctor probably saved mine, and yet you never warned him you thought I was a spy!"

THE blood in my cheeks scalded me. But I said:

"I know it now, and I won't have a spy in grandmother's house any longer. Go! Crawl if you can't walk! But first smash that wireless and the vile mirrors you've been showing Germans how to find our men with. And if I let you go instead of calling out to the French officers downstairs it's not for saving my life nor even Kentucky Nancy's, but"—somehow I could only whisper—"but because I won't have grandmother disgraced by Frenchmen knowing she's harbored a spy!"

"How do you dare call me a spy?"

"And Scorpion!" before I knew it the Scorpion had both my wrists in the hand that wasn't on his crutch, but I was too furious even to wince. "That's what grandmother called the rest of the Germans and it's what I've called you myself, ever since you told me about the horrible red star that you were born under!"

"Oh," said the Scorpion queerly.

He dropped my wrists, and suddenly I saw his eyes. They were very dark, and somehow wonderful, but I couldn't look at them. They froze me, and warmed me, and frightened me, and—and—I wanted to back to the door, yet I stood still. But the Scorpion burst out just as if I'd moved: "Wait! I've heard your story. Now, in common justice, you'll hear mine. One of us, you see, will be lying. For I don't happen to be a spy, except for four—no, five—evenings in your rose garden!"

"It was once——"

"That you saw me," he cut me off coolly. "You have to listen, *Made-moiselle*. Women don't call men what you've called me with impunity! My house is near Venizel. I was there, arranging things the week that every Frenchman knew there was a chance of war. I was alone, and I walked every evening for exercise.

"One night I strayed into a garden.

It was very quiet, quiet like a church; it was full of the scent of Provence roses; and the night was not quite dark! I saw a white moth flitter between me and the roses; a moth who danced down the long path toward me, so close I was afraid she would hear my heart. I saw you," his voice quite low, I don't know why it made my own heart pound, "with your white gown and your white arms and your grace, and I came over and over, five times in all, to see you again.

"That last night I meant to speak to you, only I heard *you* speak. 'Toinette!'—no one in the world had ever said my name like that—"I heard you wish, by my star, for someone who wanted you; and I did, so much that I would have cut my throat before I startled you. I slipped away from you while I could. I meant to come back next day, a proper visitor to the marquise, but before dawn I was gone to Soissons. I found my orders at my house. But I was in the Venizel garden, and I crawled up here from the Venizel fields, because I loved you!"

I don't think I had all my senses. I found myself fighting for them, praying I might not forget he was a spy.

I got out: "All that doesn't explain why you left a valve out of this thing in—in our garden!"

"Not if I had left it, naturally! But I hadn't. All I left was you and my red star, and the wish it had given you even before you wished it. Look at me! You know that's true!"

I COULDN'T look. I felt cold and old. It was like a lie in church to hear a man lie when he said he loved me. I said:

"I don't; I can't know it. I saw you understand what the German lights meant, I saw you take a paper from a dead Frenchman. Take it,"

I might have been crying—I didn't seem to be able to see as I pulled it out of the little bag under my blouse and gave it to him—"take it and go! I—I stole it from you the night Honorine read it."

"When?" But it sounded more like an exclamation than a question.

"When she helped you into our stable and you fainted. I took it because I didn't want a servant—" but I caught that back. "I don't know why I took it. It didn't matter to me if Honorine guessed you were a spy."

"So *that's* the explanation!" It wasn't a regular answer. I didn't know whether he meant something about Honorine or just that he'd wondered how he lost his paper. He held it out, all worn from being folded. "Read it," he ordered. "I can assure you the message has been carried out—if you don't see how!"

But all I said was: "What do you mean?" Because there was nothing to read. The only earthly thing on that paper was "*340 frs. par mois, 12 par jour.*" I didn't see any message, and I said so.

"It was one," the Scorpion shrugged his shoulders callously. "That dead soldier you saw me steal from happened to be a real German spy—340 was his number—on his way to link up with his superior, number 12. I verified his credentials."

"You mean you did it—here?"

The Scorpion looked at me almost as if he thought I was stupid.

"I stayed here for that; and for other things; one of them being a leg that almost bled me to death one night I took a ride, and the other a girl—a white moth, if you like—who calls me a spy, and a liar."

"And a Scorpion!" I finished for him, because it was no use pretending; I didn't believe one word he'd said.

I thought he'd flare out at me, but

he only stood up straight, crutch and all, and answered me exactly like an American:

"Your calling me that is the one good thing in all this mess; it shows you thought of me, anyhow! I'm waiting for a straight answer, 'Toinette. You can't mean you don't believe in me, that you don't know I've been working to save you from a real German spy every instant since I came here; that this wireless here isn't mine?"

A frightful terror shook me that I was going to believe in him; that I was going to betray grandmother and France for a spy and a liar. I knew I couldn't, if I meant to go on living, and I truly turned and fought him like a cat.

"I *won't* believe you! I saw you signaling this very morning, and Honorine must have, too. She knows you're a spy! She's gone down now to tell the French officers; they'll be up here in a minute. I hate you, and you've lied to me; but go—go before they catch you—down to the lime-kiln," and I never even prayed to be forgiven for being a traitor to grandmother and all grandmother loved, "and I'll get you to that German battery, after dark!"

"Oh, if you hate me, I'd rather stay here," said the Scorpion thickly.

He didn't seem to care a straw for the French officers. He never even looked at me. He let himself and his crutch down on a dusty, lumber-roomy sofa as if he were suddenly very tired. For the first time I saw him lower his high-held head and rest it in his hands. I had a queer feeling that the room was very quiet and that I didn't hear the German guns any more, but I didn't look out to make certain.

I knew I could no more make the Scorpion go away than I could hurry the Jugment Day, and suddenly I was frightened of Honorine, and

what she might have done. So I flew past the Scorpion and downstairs, to see if she had found the French officers and told about him: and when I opened the salon door I said: "My God!" out loud.

GRANDMOTHER was there; Honorine was there; the French officers were there. But they were all huddled into a corner, and between them and me were six gray-uniformed German officers, and outside the window were horses with gray men on them, each man with a long lance flung up at his right side.

"Uhlans!" I thought; then I didn't seem to be able to think, for beyond the Uhlans was the steel-gray flood of a German army corps—infantry, guns, everything. And I knew the French and English had been beaten once more, and that while he said he loved me the Scorpion had betrayed grandmother, and Venizel, and France!

However it had been done, it was done. There were no signs of any one but Germans as far as I could stare from the window, and it had not been my fancy that their guns had stopped and it was dead still when the Scorpion turned away from me in the turret.

It was deader still in the salon. I heard one of the French officers say: "Then we are prisoners," where he stood with his absurd blue overcoat buttoned up on each side like an overskirt to his red trousers; I heard grandmother at the Germans: "But surely you cannot mean to take wounded men out of my house!" And I heard Honorine move softly behind me and slip out of the room.

If it had been a French army corps that had flooded Venizel I would have rushed after her and choked her, sooner than let her tell anyone that the Scorpion, sitting upstairs with his splendid head in his hands,

was a spy. But it did not matter what she told to Germans. The Scorpion was safe—though he was nothing to me, of course, except that I hated him. And suddenly I forgot his eyes when he said he loved me, and lied—because I remembered something else, and that was my Kentucky Nancy and the old white horse. I had to save *them* from the Germans, somehow! I turned to sneak out to them, but I never moved.

The Scorpion was coming through the salon door past me, limping up the long room. And he was between two gray Uhlans, with his hands tied behind him with a cord!

CHAPTER VII

THE GRANARY

THE Uhlans clanked to the middle of the room and stopped. The Scorpion jerked up between them, tall and high-headed for all his bound hands.

I shut my eyes because I thought I was going crazy. But when I opened them everything was still there: the Frenchmen with their mouths open, the six German officers standing in front of grandmother as if she were a washerwoman, and the Scorpion a prisoner before them. I couldn't understand why they should arrest their own spy!

But suddenly I didn't understand, either, how he had been arrested by anyone, for even Uhlans hadn't had time to find him unless they had been told exactly where he was. I could not speak. The blood seemed to have stopped running in me, Grandmother said magnificently:

"I do not know German usage, gentleman, but while a French officer can give his word of honor not to escape it is not necessary to tie him!"

The German general answered her

for the first time, and I don't know why I didn't die, because he said:

"Naturally, madame! Only in this case we have a French spy!"

"Spy?" one French officer yelled it. Then every single one of them seemed to recognize the Scorpion, for they all spoke at once like an opera:

"D'Aurevilly! It's D'Aurevilly!" I stood like the souls who have had no faith are going to stand on the Judgment Day—just sicker and sicker—till one of the French officers appealed to the Germans. "I beg you to hold your hands! You have no spy here; you have D'Aurevilly of the cuirassiers—of my regiment!"

But it wasn't the slightest use. The German general said: "A cuirassier out of uniform, and a wireless turret! There is no case for argument," and then he turned his back.

I heard the Frenchman say: "My God, they'll hang him!"

I THINK it was grandmother who gave the horrid scream. I know it wasn't I. She went straight down on her knees before the Germans, and said that Maurice D'Aurevilly's mother was an American and her dear friend; that she should have recognized him when first he lay wounded at Venizel, only she had not seen him for years; that it was plain truth that he was a French officer—but there she broke down and just babbled that Alice D'Aurevilly's son was no spy—never, never a spy!

The only person in the room who had not spoken was the Scorpion. He just turned his head where he stood between his two Uhlans and looked at me with reckless, triumphant satisfaction, that said plain as print I would have to believe he was no German spy now! I thought his eyes must have killed me. It was my fault he was there. If I had not been an obstinate self-centered fool up in the

lumber-room I would have believed in him. I could have saved him from——

"From Number 12," I heard myself whisper, as if someone else had given me a perfectly incredible keyword. "From Honorine!"

For the whole thing jumped out clear before me like writing on a wall. It was Honorine who had betrayed the Scorpion to the Uhlans, and it was Honorine who was the real German spy at Venizel!

If a mind can jabber, mine jabbered as I stood in the salon door. Something that I did not know was in it, too, though I'll tell you what that was by and by. Then my thoughts went on on top of it, in sharp fast facts.

It was Honorine who had done everything I had put down to the Scorpion; Honorine who had fixed up the wireless in our turret long before the war, and dropped that bit of wire and valve I picked up in the rose garden the first time I ever saw the Scorpion. And it was for Honorine's sake Chateau Venizel had never been hit with shrapnel from the very first day.

For the rest, the paper the Scorpion had taken from a dead Frenchman who was no Frenchman was only another link with Honorine. Naturally she thought when she read it that it was the Scorpion himself who was 340 in the German spy service. She must have talked to him as a comrade, and let out enough to show him how to use his blue flashlight when he saved me from the Germans on the Soissons road.

I saw, of course, that all the time I had been watching him he had been watching Honorine; and the finish of my bonehead work hit me so hard that I clutched the salon doorpost.

It was Honorine again, who had been signaling to the German battery with that awful looking-glass

thing the Scorpion must have taken from her the second before I opened the turret-room door! It was he who had caught her, not she who had caught him, and it was for my sake—mine, who hated her, only he could not know it—that he had given her till that night to get out of Venizel instead of denouncing her straight off to the French officers downstairs.

And Honorine had seen her chance to get paid for the fool he had made of her, and given him up as a spy the second the Germans came!

If it would have done the least bit of good I would have screamed it all out where I stood in the salon door. But it would have been no help with the Germans, even if I could have proved it. And, anyhow, I had no time.

The German general said something; the two Uhlans moved toward me and the salon door, and the Scorpion looked at me from between them as he passed. He could only limp on the crutch that was jammed under his shoulder, the borrowed clothes that I could have killed myself for letting him wear were torn, and he had a cut on one cheek; but his face was recklessly triumphant still—till he saw mine.

I don't know what I looked like, but he must have known I believed in him at last, for his eyes changed as if joy struck him blind.

Then he was gone.

I SUPPOSE I could have run and thrown my arms around him. There was time enough. But I never thought of it. I felt as light and fierce as if I were a flame.

If I could not save him, I could try! Not as grandmother had tried, down on her knees, sobbing on the salon floor, but out-of-doors, where they would kill the man they called a spy.

I prayed that I could get out, that

the Germans would let me pass; and I believe Heaven turned my eyes to what I saw, though it was just Honorine, in the hall between me and the Scorpion who was going out to die.

There was a Uhlan officer beside her, and I would have liked to have killed her and then him, but I pretended I didn't even see the man. What I really did seem to see, and if it sounds crazy it was just another light from Heaven, was Kentucky Nancy's roan face in the dusk of the lime-kiln.

If I could get the Scorpion in with Nancy I might save him; through Honorine, too, who had betrayed him. She really loved horses; it was the one decent thing about her, or she must have told about mine long ago. I believed she would honestly help me to keep them hidden from the Germans; and if she did it might save the Scorpion too. I was afraid to my soul of what I was going to do, but I did it. I said:

"Honorine, God deliver us from spies!"

Honorine gave a kind of held-in yelp. She was dead white and more viperish than ever, though as she looked after the Scorpion she pretended to cry. She said:

"Mon Dieu, the poor soul! But Mademoiselle always hated him."

And I said, six inches from the Uhlan officer:

"Oh, yes, I always hated him, but they're fools to kill him like this. There is plenty they could get out of him that they'll never get from a dead spy." Then I whispered in Honorine's ear: "Let me pass. I'm afraid for my horses; I have to go to them."

Honorine believed me. She let me by. But I nearly screamed out and ruined everything, because the Uhlan officer called an order after his two men and the Scorpion:

"Keep that man for interrogation! Lock him in the granary."

The last word burned into me like hot lead into a board.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SLIDE

THE Granary!

The granary was the last place to get anyone out of, the most hopeless place in all Venizel. But suddenly I knew it wasn't there! There was a chance there, if I were strong enough, and if we were in time.

I would have been done for if Honorine had seen my face at the thought that came to me, but all she saw was my back as I faded out of the hall down a passage that led to a garbage-hole kind of door she knew I went in and out by to feed my horses, so that my regular hours wouldn't draw attention to the lime-kiln.

But I didn't go to my horses. I tore down some twisty stone stairs to a barred cellar window that looked on the granary yard.

My heart pounded till I could hardly peer out of it, for if the two Uhlans went inside the place with the Scorpion the chance I had thought of was no chance at all. Somebody that didn't seem to be me began to pray, "Put him in quick, put him in alone," till at last, around the long path round the house that was five times the distance I'd come, I saw the Scorpion go by. His two Uhlans were dragging him and I don't know where his crutch was, but they opened the granary door and shoved him in—alone!

I let my head go back and breathed—and I'd better explain why.

The granary looked like a hopeless prison. It was just a solid stone building sticking out from the back wall of our stables, without any

opening through them. There was only one door to it, that the Uhlans had sat down outside of after they locked the Scorpion in, and one window that was too high for him to climb out of, let alone being straight over their heads; but if they'd gone inside they might have seen there was something more to the granary.

High up in the wall, on the stable side, was a slide, like the service slide some people have in their dining-rooms, only this one was used to fill the corn bins in the stable loft from the granary with a block and tackle and buckets. That slide was the one chance I had thought of for the Scorpion, and I didn't even think I could save him by it. I knew only that I was going to try.

NATURALLY I didn't go near the granary, nor the two Uhlans sitting outside yelling for food and wine to someone I couldn't see. I went out of my garbage-hole door toward the lime-kiln, through field kitchens and German soldiers and our hens they were killing to eat, and bolted back into the stable Red Cross hospital as if I were frightened. I was, too; but it was only the fear that I might be stopped before I got there.

The Red Cross man was in the stable, but he didn't notice me, because he was talking to two German officers; and it was lucky I saw them before I ran to the loft up the coach-house stairs that were straight before their eyes.

I slid through the coach house instead to an empty loose-box in a corner of the stable, where it was dark and no one could see, and shut the door. Then I climbed up the manger and the hayrack out of that loose-box into the hayloft above it—the way the horses' hay came down.

It was a greenish sort of dark in the loft, and I clawed over the mountain of hay between me and the

granary till I fell down the other side of it, half choked and more than half blinded with hayseed, but I couldn't stop to clear my eyes.

There was no earthly sense in being cautious. If the German officer were in the granary interrogating the Scorpion I was too late—if he weren't there I had to be quick. I opened the slide.

After the hay loft the granary was light, because of the high little window in it; I saw the Scorpion below me, alone! But I think he saw me first, looking like nothing on earth with my hair all hay, and I was crying, anyhow. But all the Scorpion said was: "*Toinette!*"

I held up my hand to be quiet. I was there before any Uhlan officer and I believed in him and every word he'd ever said to me, but there was no time to explain all that now. I pushed the big corn bucket through the slide and let it down by the rope round the winch to the granary floor, and why the men outside didn't hear I don't know.

Then I signed to him to get in and I would haul him up. But the Scorpion looked straight at me and shook his head. I knew he meant he was too heavy. I was beginning to say I would come down if he didn't come up, when he whispered:

"Get a couple of turns round the winch. Lock it!"

I saw what he meant to do and he was right, because if his weight made me let go of the winch I would have dropped him, and probably gotten a fractured skull myself.

But I was perfectly sick as I watched the Scorpion climb that rope hand over hand and remembered what the exertion might be doing to his half-healed leg. I dared not even warn him to take his time; the dreadful hurry of the thing was the awful part.

I hauled the Scorpion to the loft

floor as soon as I could reach him, pulled up the rope and bucket and shut the slide. Then I got his arm over my shoulder and helped him, not over the hay, for I couldn't do it, but round by the cat's path between it and the loft wall.

I thought I'd probably kill him getting him down into the loose-box, but there was no other way out, and when I dropped into the manger, he lowered himself from the loft till his sound foot was on my shoulder.

NEITHER of us spoke till I got the hay off us and was going in to the Red Cross man for a spare crutch, when I remembered something pretty desperate. I couldn't take a man with a crutch down to the lime-kiln, when two Uhlans might be hunting for that very man any minute! The Scorpion would just have to walk there—and his life probably depended on his walking straight. I said:

"You'll have to go without a crutch as far as the lime-kiln. If you limp they'll know you!"

And the Scorpion and I walked out of the dark loose-box through the stable where the Red Cross man was still talking to the German officers, and out—out into the sunlight I'd thought he might never see again.

Not one soul noticed us. We just went; past the German soldiers and the field kitchens and the smell of dinners, till we were clear; then through the lilac hedge out into the open space before the lime-kiln, where there wasn't one sign of war nor danger but the clamor we'd left behind. And the Scorpion walked without a limp the whole way. How, I don't know; but he did. I was between laughing and crying with joy as I pushed him into the lime-kiln, thinking how easy it had been to save him and that all I had to do now was to hide him and hoodwink

Honorine, when he gave one look at me and dropped on a heap of straw as if he'd been chopped down.

For one awful minute I thought he was dead, and I suppose I was frantic. Instead of piling straw over him so that he couldn't be seen from the lime-kiln door, I tried to lift him behind it, and couldn't. I whined at him to speak to me, and he didn't.

But it was when I turned round to get water for him out of my Nancy's bucket that my blood stopped running, and I knew it didn't matter whether he lived or died. For I turned straight on Honorine!

CHAPTER IX.

CAPITALS AND SMALL PRINT

SHE was silhouetted in the lime-kiln door, her neat black frock and *soignée* head against the sunlight behind her; that sunlight I'd thought the Scorpion might see for years and years. She and I stood and looked at each other, I from beside the Scorpion, and she where she was all black against the light except her face with its viper's eyes.

I didn't speak. Honorine said:

"So that is how *Mademoiselle* always hated that spy!" She pointed at the Scorpion, and I can never put down how awful her voice was. But suddenly she laughed at me, with all the hatred she had never dared show: "*Mademoiselle* has wasted much trouble! It is as easy to come here as to the granary, to finish a spy!"

I knew she meant she was going away to tell where we were, and that I had to kill her first with my revolver I always carried in my skirt pocket. It was funny how quiet I felt. I said quite softly:

"It was you who were the spy, Honorine!"

Honorine laughed again.

"Of course—though *Mademoiselle* has taken some time to find it out!

And what will she do about it now? Tell the Germans—who pay me?"

I knew what I was going to do about it till that very second. Then—well, I didn't know anything. The hand hanging down by my side was clutching nothing but a fold of my skirt. My revolver was gone! I'd lost it.

I kept from screaming before Honorine. I looked at the Scorpion, but if he weren't dead there was no help in his shut eyes. There was only me, alone with Honorine in the lime-kiln.

But I missed her as I sprang. That was all there was to it. She was gone before I even touched her. And as she vanished behind the lilac hedge that was all that separated us from the Germans, she called back at me something that I should have known, and something I'd forgotten:

"Your so dear revolver, *c'est moi qui l'a prit!* And your horses, *hein?* You have twenty minutes to say good-bye to your horses before the Uhlans come to take them and your spy away!"

My horses! I turned back to the Scorpion, but the things I really saw were my revolver in Honorine's pocket and my roan Kentucky Nancy standing beside the old white horse; two dumb beasts that I had failed, just as I had failed the man I loved. I sat down on the straw between him and my horses, that I couldn't even kill now. I was too dull and sick to cry.

If you think I might have done something still, I thought of it, too. I had two horses; it sounded easy enough to load myself and the Scorpion upon them and just ride away, only I couldn't do it. I could not lift the Scorpion, though I tried till my temples felt as if they'd burst.

If I might have begged his life from Honorine it would only have

been wasting breath. She hated him for finding her out, and she was drunk with the German triumph besides. There was nothing I could do but sit where I was, and I sat there, blind and deaf to everything but the blood beating in my face, and my hands that looked all dirty and shaking where they lay in my lap, till I jumped as a loose wire jumps when they turn on the current. The Scorpion's hand was touching mine!

I THINK I cried out. I don't know. All I did know was that he wasn't dead, and that I had to steady myself and give him water. Presently he whispered that he was all right; it was only using the torn tissues of his leg that had upset him; and then he said something about my saving him. That killed me; I couldn't be steady.

"Honorine—the Uhlans—twenty minutes," I got out in silly gasps; and then that I hadn't saved him, and couldn't we take the horses and run for the Soissons road before it was too late for all of us? The Scorpion shook his head in a queer sort of way, and I knew I was a fool. I said:

"Do you mean then—you and the horses—" but I couldn't finish.

The Scorpion sat up in the straw. There must have been some truth in the nonsense he had once talked about his red star and the vital fire of life in his heart, because though he was dead white his eyes suddenly came alive.

"Your horses, you poor little American consul!" he exclaimed. "We'll save *them*."

I knew he meant he would send me and the horses off, and stay for the Uhlans by himself. I gabbled something about not that, never that, and that it would be better for us all to be shot together making for the

Soissons road. But the Scorpion checked me short.

"No Uhlans have me yet, and till they have we won't try the first thing they'd think of. There's the garden—where you first saw my star. Get the bridles on the horses, while I see if the way is clear, and we'll make for the garden. Once we're there, I know a place to go."

"Yes," I was having my own work to bridle Nancy. "Oh, why didn't we use Honorine's wireless for help while we could!"

"Couldn't! Didn't you know?" He actually smiled. "That thing was only a receiving set that can't be detected or located except by actually finding the aerals concealed in any sort of loft, like Honorine's turret. Nobody could send on it! She only got news, and that was risky enough. That valve you showed me put me onto it, but I never found it till this morning."

He crawled to the lime-kiln door, with his lame leg trailing, and looked out; but he didn't seem to hear me when I said the horses were ready. I jumped after him for fear—well, for fear! But Honorine could not have found her Uhlan officer, and the space before the lime-kiln was empty still.

There was the lilac hedge on one side of it; the lane to the Soissons road on the other; and in front the bare open field stretching to the back wall of the Venize! garden where I had first seen my rose-colored star and the Scorpion. But he wasn't looking at any of them. He was out in the open, staring up at the sky: the stupid, empty blue sky.

Far, far off in the purple haze of the horizon I could see something, too, floating up into the blue air like thistle-down, but it didn't seem a sensible thing for us to be staring at when our only hope was to get over into the garden, quick.

"What's the use of watching their horrible Fokker?" I began, and the Scorpion flashed round.

"It's French; it's an observer," he said as if he were up in the air with it. "Take the horses and run for the garden. I want to—I don't suppose it's any use for a miracle, but one might come!"

I couldn't see how.

BUT I wasn't going off with the horses, either, because it was simply rubbish for the Scorpion to think he could ever crawl across that open field; and besides, somehow I had to watch, too. I saw the French airman soar, and then swoop straight over us; but it wasn't that I was watching.

The Scorpion had hauled something out of his pocket, and it was just a broken bit of that looking-glass thing I'd seen him with in the morning before I knew he'd taken it from Honorine. But he never did a thing with it. He just sat on the grass, quite still.

I wondered if he believed the *aviateur* saw him! If he did, I know he could never come close down and scoop us up, if that was the miracle the Scorpion was waiting for. But if it was, it didn't happen. Either the airman didn't realize us or he didn't care.

Not one single German fired at him, either, if they saw him, but suddenly he began to climb and climb and go off, till once more his plane looked like thistle-down floating in the purple haze off the plain. I looked from the empty sky to the Scorpion still on the ground outside the lime-kiln, with the noise of the Germans coming over the lilac hedge.

"Get up," I burst out at him, "and I'll bring out the horses! What are you waiting for? If that man saw us he isn't going to help us!"

"He couldn't help. And it wasn't

necessary that he should see us; he could read the capitals if he couldn't the small print," said the Scorpion absently; then suddenly blazed out at me, as if he'd only just realized I was there. "I told you to go, 'Toinette! Now, it's too—get back to the horses—quick!"

But I didn't answer—if you don't count putting my arms under his shoulders and hauling at him; because he was right, and it was too late. I scrambled him back into the lime-kiln, and—just as we got inside with the door shut on us all but an inch—five pairs of Uhlans rode through the lilac hedge into the open field before us.

WHY my horses didn't whinny I don't know, but they were silent. And the Scorpion and I were silent. We heard the Uhlans dismount, but they didn't come near the lime-kiln, and of course from the outside there wasn't a sign of the Scorpion and me inside; though that was not much comfort to me when I realized that Honorine's Uhlan officer must have just sent his men to guard us till he came.

We could see them through the crack of the door, and they were only sprawling on the grass and letting their loose horses feed, but we knew it was all up, just the same. We had nothing to fight with, and a lame man and a girl could not have done much against ten Uhlans even if we could have tried.

They were making such a noise shouting to each other that it couldn't matter whether we talked or not, but we didn't—till the Scorpion cursed himself softly for not having sent me away.

I didn't care anything about that and I said so, and that perhaps the French airman would send help for him after all. But he only smiled,

and muttered something about this not being the affair of himself. It was France. If there were sufficient French troops behind the airman to come against the Germans unexpectedly one cuirassier more or less was no matter.

I couldn't feel like that. I just cried. The Scorpion took me in his arms and whispered my name, and could I ever forgive him? But of course it was he who had everything to forgive, or he never would have been in any lime-kiln with no possible way out, except past Germans at the front door.

I said that, too, but he only hushed me. After a while he told me things. He had an American mother, and a house in New York where she lived because she was an invalid, and he loved America; but of course he was a Frenchman first of all.

Presently he talked of what did matter to a girl who loved a man who was going to die. I can't put down much of that. I think the Scorpion said this life was nothing, and that when they came for him I must just stand aside and let him go!

But I couldn't bear it. I remembered the first time I ever saw him and his star in the Venizel garden; and the second time kneeling in the cornfield, tall and high-headed under his shining silver helmet with its little gold aigrettes, its big scarlet pompons and long black plume. He would never wear his gleaming cuirasse again, nor point to his Scorpion star: and all of it was my fault except not getting him away from the lime-kiln before the Uhlans came.

But that last thought stabbed me. I was clenching my hands to keep from bursting out in sheer wickedness that he could not love me, or he would never have waited to watch his wretched airman and thought of France before me, when he spoke in a perfectly businesslike sort of voice:

"Get back, my 'Toinette; back by the horses! It's time."

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

BUT he needn't have told me. I knew. I heard the tailing-off shout somewhere behind the lilac hedge, and the Uhlans clattering up as if they came to attention. Honorine's officer had come at last.

I moved to my horses. I had to, when the Scorpion spoke in that kind of voice. But I wasn't brave. I clutched my Kentucky-Nancy and heard myself trying to breathe; heard the Scorpion breathing just as usual, only a little quicker; heard my own heart, too, drum-drumming out the seconds we had left before the Uhlan officer stood in the lime-kiln door.

There seemed to be minutes of them, as long as if time had stopped. Then someone barked out an order, and outside there was a fearful clatter. The Scorpion sat bolt upright, high-headed, and—oh, ready! but I couldn't look at him. I thought I must have died somehow where I waited and gone somewhere that nothing could happen to us any more; because—*no one came!*

Five more minutes went, and then another five; and still no Honorine, no Uhlan officer, no anyone opened the lime-kiln door!

I saw the Scorpion jerk himself to it and look out the crack. He said something I couldn't hear, and I jumped to him. Then I knew for certain we'd died and gone to heaven, for the space in front of us was empty. The Uhlans were gone!

I tore the door open. Over our heads was the drone of a German avion going off like an express train; bugle after bugle yelped out between us and the chateau; through the

lilacs we saw Infantry, Uhlans, awful *mitrailleuses* beginning to move in a furious tangled gray flood that streamed for the chateau gates and the bridge over the Aisne.

I was afraid to move; I don't think the Scorpion ever thought of it. Three hours went by like three minutes, till I saw the sun was setting and the last man of the Germans gone.

"They've retreated—run," the Scorpion gasped at me, dead white and shaking for the first time that awful day. "Come; we must get to the marquise—the French prisoners," and suddenly the color flashed into his face like a flame. "The French," he said quite quietly, "*mon Dieu*, the French!"

He pointed through the lilacs, and in the sunset light I saw the first of the little small French hussars come cantering in; then the beginning of what was three French army corps—dusty, tired, anyhow, but there!—rolled in like a wave.

It was the beginning of the first French offensive, the pale fore-runner of far-off victory and my America in the war, though I couldn't know that then.

I wanted to run and see if grandmother was safe, but I didn't stir. Even with the Scorpion telling me we must get to the chateau and find her I didn't stir; because of Honorine!

Her name banged on my brain like a hammer.

There was still Honorine! The Scorpion and I were the only people who knew she was Number 12, the German spy. She would finish us somehow before we could reach grandmother and tell it. I remembered her standing by her Uhlan officer in the chateau hall with murder in her viper's eyes.

She would be standing in it again now, waiting for us; waiting for "an

accident" with my stolen revolver hidden in her neat black dress. I dared not take the Scorpion to the wide front door and the spacious hall with its dark corners, its easy doorways, its shadows; I dared not take him to my garbage-hole door; and he would not stay where he was.

Of course, I should have gone straight to the nearest French soldiers, but I was too dazed. The only thing I thought of was that there was a side door from our shrubbery straight into a little breakfast room no one ever used, and that there would be no Honorine waiting for the Scorpion there.

I got his arms over my shoulders and helped him limp over to it, through the garden and the thick syringas where Honorine could never see us coming, opened the door into the little room where I meant to leave him while I ran to the French and betrayed Honorine as she had betrayed him.

And the instant I got inside it I knew it was the last room I should ever have come to, even alone. For Honorine was there!

She was sitting with her back to me, at a table spread with what had been lunch for two. In the cold twilight of the little room I saw disordered dishes, a broken wineglass, a red stain on the white table cloth, an overturned chair opposite Honorine; saw them while I jumped for her shoulders to hold her down with my last strength while I screamed and screamed for help. Only my hands fell and I couldn't scream. Honorine was stone dead where she sat at the table. She was dead!

The Scorpion caught at me, pointing to the upset chair.

"Her Uhlan," he said quite quietly. "He kept her to lunch with him when she came back from the lime-kiln, and jumped when the alarm sounded.

And when he thought Number 12 had betrayed him and been only pretending to betray me! He shot her, on the chance, before he ran."

He might have; I don't know, any more than I know how I got out of that room and met grandmother. I just found myself in the salon with the French officers there just as I had left them, only now they were all kissing my hand for saving the Scorpion and saying they were not prisoners after all. I was stammering that I hadn't done anything when grandmother beckoned from the door, and I heard the Scorpion call "Toinette!"

Grandmother had him stretched out on the big sofa in her sitting-room; and he must have told her things or she would never have sent me in to him nor forgotten to light the candles.

The room was dark: so dark that through the open window out-of-doors looked light. I went over to the Scorpion, but I couldn't speak. Low over the Venizel garden I could see a star like a ruby and rose-topaz mixed; my star and the Scorpion's, too—and what I had wished by it had come true!

Any other time I would have shivered, remembering a dead woman sitting alone at a table, but then all I could think of was that grandmother and I and France were rid of Honorine, and that the Scorpion had told the truth from the beginning. And where I stood by him he grabbed my hand, hard.

"Toinette," he was perfectly business-like, "will you marry me—soon—before I can go back to the front?"

What I said wasn't exactly an answer; and, anyhow, I was looking out of the window into the pale blue sort of dark, to where the Scorpion's Heart hung over the garden and shone in on us like a rose-red signal from the brave company of heaven.

Some Day

By HENRY LEVERAGE

E. TILDEN TIDD heard the door of his room close after the clerk dropped a worn leather bag on a rag carpet and went on downstairs in the Eagle House, a Western hotel.

The "star chamber" of the hotel had a pitcher on a stand, a bed, calico drapery over a window, an austere look that brought E. Tilden Tidd's memory back to days spent in prison cells.

E. Tilden sighed, shivered at the utter lack of warmth in the room, then he reflected:

"Well, a man ain't beat till he says he is, and I ain't said it yet. I'm over the state line and where there's freedom, there's hope."

Getting down on his knees, E. Tilden removed everything from the leather bag except a flat, well-wrapped package. He rose, mopped his brow, took off his collar, gazed at it ruefully and tossed it under the bed on the edge of which he seated himself and slowly removed his dust-stained shoes. He pinched the toe of each sock with a sigh of relief. He fell to studying the ugly pattern of the ceiling as some crystal globe filled with possibilities.

THE past kept crowding in on his thoughts with cruel regularity — the rank-scented, police-haunted past. He could recollect but few states where he was not wanted. He had escaped from the long arm of the law more through luck than any other reason. He was wanted for everything on the criminal code except kidnapping. He had been his own worst enemy. He had fled to the Western

town called Mount Calm, in order to get away from former storms. The name had looked soothing upon the map.

A stray fly buzzed across his vision. He brushed at it angrily. He swatted it on the yellow wall with his palm, and drew, for his pains, a protest from a shoe drummer in the next room who was trying to sleep through a Sunday afternoon.

"Sufferin' cats!" declared E. Tilden. "He ought to be glad I swatted hard. If I'd hit a little easier, I'd never a-landed th' pest. Me a-killin' flies! Why, I ought to have a yacht an' a limousine. I'm a simp in a world of suckers. Broke! Without a kopeck! Broke——"

E. TILDEN closed one eye. Across the screen of his mind, as a double exposure, there came the thought that hid behind the name of the town. "Mount Calm," he repeated over and over. "Now, where in Himalaya have I heard of this burg? It's a winner if I get it. It's an ace, deuce, trey, a pair of nines and—I win! Deacon Decker's th' man. Deacon Decker of Mount Calm. He's th' mark that wrote me about some United Bonanza, Gold Mining and Milling, gilt-edged, double-decked stock."

E. Tilden sat bolt upright. His stubby finger crept to one optic. A cherub smile curled his lips; the last vestige of youth in all his face. He rose and tiptoed to the cracked water-pitcher. Tilting this, he cooled his parched throat. Then he went to the window and peered through the gritty curtains. A yard stretched below. Beyond this yard rose a rough shed.

Over the shed a plowed field and a hedge of trees comprised the landscape. "All good!" chirped E. Tilden. "Fine land!" he concluded, as he turned and started to dress.

HE was about to leave the room when a Bible upon a table attracted his attention. He lifted it with the intention of impressing the Deacon. It jerked from under his arm as he started for the door. Turning, he saw it was fastened by a small, brass chain to the table leg. He reached, picked the Good Book up, and noticed a name printed on the inner cover:

"This Bible is the property of Sarah Janesay of Mount Calm."

E. Tilden whistled. "Thanks," he said, starting out. "Thanks, Sarah! I hope the whole burg 'ain't tied down with a chain."

E. TILDEN TIDD paused on his way from the hotel to the church, where the clerk, when questioned, stated that Deacon Decker could be found at that hour.

He surveyed the sleeping town, then went on. He churned up the dust of the road. He grunted now and then as he passed through hedges and open fields of close cultivation.

"I'm a mining man now," he remembered with a mental effort. "I'm a chlorination expert, a Wilfrey-table man. I'm hangin', wall an' foot wall. I'm slope and incline. I'm as deep as the Yellow Jacket and shallow as a placer." He stopped for breath.

"I'm free-gold an' free-milling," he continued. "I'm low-grade an' a stamp mill. I'm slime an' slag. I'm th' tailings an' th' riffles. I'm crucible an' melting pot. I'm furnace an' sluice-box. I'm a triple-lever toggle an' a mortar. I'm chloride an' a trace; seam and fissure. I'm galena an' silver. I'm three per cent, copper glance. I'm gold, gold, gold—heavy to get, an' hard to hold. I'm full paid

an' non-assessable. I'm gilt-edged an' a Golconda. I'm California, Colorado, South Africa an' th' Yukon. I'm——"

E. Tilden paused in his catechism. A horse, followed by a swaying chaise, thundered behind him. In it a woman stood sawing at the lines—a scrawny creature with the face of a shrew. Her church-bonnet was sadly awry; her black alpaca dress was drawn upon a line with two toothpick shanks.

The horse plunged on toward E. Tilden. It sway-backed the road. The old chaise snapped dangerously. The woman sawed with scissored elbows. E. Tilden calculated the speed to be as much as a milk train running wild. He sprang to the middle of the road, threw his hands on high with a shooping motion, then smiled sardonically when the nag put on the brakes, skidded, and came to a snorting halt before him.

The woman described a perfect parabola over the trembling haunches of the horse. E. Tilden grabbed her out of the air. He whirled her once. He set her upon her shanks and steadied her before he removed his supporting arms.

"Hurt much?" he asked, as she stiffened to a towering standstill.

Her lips moved without sound. Her hand crept down and adjusted the alpaca skirt. Her sharp elbow almost punctured E. Tilden's mid-ribs as she righted the poke-bonnet and gave the gray of her hair a nervous pat.

"Hurt much?" repeated E. Tilden.

The woman turned to the wreck of the chaise. She seized the nag's bridle, and jerked its head toward the side of the road. E. Tilden, with a soft whistle, assisted in removing the wheels and the body of the chaise. The rest was attached to the horse. He mopped his brow with his sleeve. He repeated the inquiry, in a meek, mild tone.

"Hurt much?"

"Heard yer!" snapped the woman with tragic air. "I heard yer, first time."

"Thanks," said E. Tilden.

The glance he received was a dagger's thrust.

"I heard yer," she continued. "You should have let Dobbin go on. I would have controlled him before he reached the church. You did wrong in stopping us. Always let a fool horse run itself out. What is your name, young man?"

E. Tilden felt like a felon under an indictment. He mopped his face. He hummed and hawed. He gave the name that disgraced most of the police-blotters of the country.

"Pleased to meet you," cackled the woman. "What is your business? What d'ye do—travel?"

"Mining," said E. Tilden, vaguely.

"Mining?"

THE accusation in her voice was food for caution. "That is," he went on, "that is, you see, it's like this. I'm lookin' for an outcropping of Fort Benton shale, jes' a-lookin'. I'm up at th' hotel, th' Eagle House."

"Are you?" The voice was tintured with suspicion.

E. Tilden nodded.

The woman turned toward the grazing nag at the side of the road. "I be going to church now," she said. "The services have started. You mind Dobbin till somebody comes. It won't be long. Tell them it's Sarah Janesay's rig. They'll take it to the farm. Tell them I'll pay 'em. I be late. I haven't been to meetin' since Friday. You come, because I want to see you."

E. Tilden went to the fringe of grass that bordered the road. He sat down.

"A fine Jane, that!" he remarked, picking at a blade of clover. "She's so thin she'd have to stand up twice to make a shadow. She's th' one that

put th' Bible on a chain in that awful Eagle House.

"Item one," he ruminated on the clover. "Item one is th' bonds I got in th' old yellow satchel. Item two is th' Deacon. Item three is th' Jane. I've dated her. I'm gettin' along fine— Hey, you kid! Hey, come here!"

E. Tilden had called to a barefooted boy who was eyeing the hungry nag.

"That's Janesay's rig," the lad stammered, tiptoeing through the dust to E. Tilden's side.

"It sure is, or what's left of it, son," said E. Tilden, rising. "Now, you fix things up as best you can, an' get them over to th' ranch. She said she'd pay for it."

The boy's eyes closed in an expressive wink.

"Pay," he said doubtfully. "She's so stingy she ain't painted her house in fifteen years."

"So?" drawled E. Tilden.

"She's the richest woman for miles and miles, too," volunteered the boy.

"Here's a dime for that," chuckled E. Tilden as he started along the road toward the church. "Catch it, kid, an' 'tend to th' horse. I'll tell her you're on th' job with both bare feet and cheeks of tan.

THE services were half over and the prim minister upon his second wind when E. Tilden dropped into a pew reserved for lost sheep and traveling salesmen. He placed his hat on the floor, then leaned forward and listened with rapt attention.

The text was: "Thou shalt not steal." It seemed to be directed at him with a long finger of suspicion. He woke to the wheezing of an organ. The choir, all in white, emitted its final high notes that rang in the ancient rafters.

A man was coming toward him with a collection plate. E. Tilden

fished for a single thin dime and let it rattle into the plate. He peered into the face of the plate-bearer. He was a spare figure of a man with a head like a hard-boiled egg which had leaked and dripped down till the white of this same egg formed a tapering beard, yellow at its edges from the yoke of time.

"That's him!" declared E. Tilden with conviction. "That's th' Deacon, th' sure-thing buyer of United Bonanza. Not for himself, oh, no! He don't look like a man who would do anything like that."

He exchanged glances with the evil-visaged raven.

"All is discovered!" whispered E. Tilden into the bent ear of the man with the plate. "Meet me in th' back sheds after service."

The Deacon bowed and strode on up the aisle. E. Tilden chuckled. The shot had gone home.

HE forgot his appointment with the lady of the runaway. He veered round the white church and waited for the buggies and wagons to back out of the place. His cigar was half smoked when there came a soft step back of the shed, a tap on the planks at the rear which made him turn his head. An eye was taking aim at him through the bore of a knot-hole.

E. Tilden dragged at the cigar. He beckoned inside. The eye vanished.

A white icicle-like beard hove in sight. It was followed by the rest of Deacon Decker, clothed in a Prince Albert, Nile-green on the bias, and greasy at the seams.

"Who are you?" asked the Deacon with infinite caution.

"A miner," declared E. Tilden. "A poor, unfortunate miner with a block of United Bonanza, Gold Mining an' Milling, full-paid and non-assessable, gilt-edged stock duly issued by th'——"

The Deacon's face cleared as much

as it ever could clear. He offered a talon-like hand. E. Tilden winced in its grasp. He led from the shed.

"My carriage is not here," the Deacon said. "We'll walk! This way, please, down through the lane. Easy, easy—now over this stump. I want to show you the finest field of clover you ever saw in your life. See! We are alone, my friend, my mining friend."

E. Tilden gasped at the utter caution of the movement. "I'm an infant in th' game," he concluded, "compared to this arch-pirate."

"Shoot out your tale," exclaimed Deacon Decker. "You have stock, you say? A client of mine was once interested. I don't know about this client, now. It's been some time. You were to vend the stock to me for thirty cents a share. Is that correct?"

"Still thirty, but no less!" declared E. Tilden. He would have sold the entire issue for wallpaper at present prices. "Thirty cents, and goin' up," he insisted. "New strike on the sixth level!"

"Can you make delivery?"

"The ore?"

"No, the stock."

"In ten minutes."

THE Deacon hesitated. He cackled dryly beneath his beard. One talon drew from a back pocket a plug of tobacco upon which he bit, repeated the action, then weighed it in the palm of his hand, as if calculating its value.

E. Tilden found a cigar and proffered it.

"No, thanks, I'm chewin'," mouthed the Deacon. "Chewin' and thinkin' your price is too high. This client of mine will want the stock at about fifty. We better go fifty-fifty. You've done nothing. I've done it all, or am going to do it all—get the buyer, the purchaser."

"I only furnish th' mine, th' re-

ports, th' assays, th' samples—th' literature, the Boston office, th' incorporation, th' steel-engraved stock certificates. That's all I do," chirped E. Tilden.

"As agent for the purchaser," declared the Deacon with asperity, "I'm entitled to fifty-fifty. How much stock have you got?"

"All!" lipped E. Tilden. "All th' law would stand."

"That is?"

"One million shares, full-paid an' non-assessable. Half I got, half is in th' treasury."

"Where is the treasury?"

"In Boston."

"Where's the mine?"

"Arizona, near th' United Verde."

"How near?"

"About two hundred miles."

The Deacon smiled coldly. "You'll do," he said offering his hand. "You'll do nicely. I jes' wanted to know. Have the stock ready in three days. All of it! Don't tell anybody your business. Lay low and pull the covers over your head. I'm at the bank, but don't come near me. I'll send a boy when I want the stock. That's all. We better separate."

"I promised to meet a lady," E. Tilden said, as the Deacon started toward the church. "A lady——"

"What's her name?"

"Janesay."

"You know her?"

"Saved her from a smash-up, that's all."

"Keep away from her! D'ye hear? Keep away from her! She's a gossip. She'd crab the whole game!"

E. TILDEN made a wide detour round the town. He came to the Eagle House by way of a cow-path. He leaned over the desk which was graced by two potatoes, porcupined with pen-holders. He started as he detected an envelope in his box.

The curtain at the end of the bar, opened at his vigorous knocking. The clerk came through from the village "speak-easy" and handed E. Tilden the envelope.

"Boy left it," said the clerk.

"Love at first sight," chirped E. Tilden, climbing to his room. "This Jane with th' kale wishes to thank me for th' rescue. I see wedding bells, but not for me. I wouldn't marry that female for all th' gold of Ophir, unless I went blind."

"I'm it," he said, as he kicked the bag to see if the package of stock was still there. "I'm it! I'm nominated for the Matrimony Stakes, but I ain't goin' to run. Th' man what marries for money, earns it!"

Three days passed — three long-drawn periods that were as years from some judge to a felon. E. Tilden heard no word from the Deacon. He wondered if the verbal transaction had been just a dream. He drank to forget, despite the fact that the town was temperate. He waited, hoping against all his hopes.

The lady of the runaway and the fortune sent him two notes. Each time he responded by walking over to the farm and searching for shale or coal outcroppings which he knew were not there, and never would be there, unless a volcano blew up Mount Calm and vicinity.

She had accompanied him and had listened to his elevating monologue upon tipples, oil, shale, deposits, surface indications, derricks, drills, go-devils, and the virtues of nitro-glycerin.

Each time he made his departure, her hand-clasp had been more cordial. Each time she reached her room, she had spun from the whirl of his monologue. It was a classic of its kind. He knew it like a *ham-actor* knows the leads of *Romeo*. E. Tilden had still other resources than matrimony.

IT was upon the fourth day when the summons came from Deacon Decker. A knock sounded at the door. E. Tilden surmised it would be the clerk with a letter from Sarah. It was a boy from the bank.

The note he brought was to the point: "Send the stock by messenger and stay under cover."

"Tell him," snapped E. Tilden, "that I'll send th' stock over when he sends me th' money, or a receipt for the stock. What does he think I am, a boob or a hick?"

The boy grinned, went through the door, and returned within the hour with a longer note than the first. E. Tilden chewed upon this before he reached for the leather bag. The note ran:

"Received from E. Tilden Tidd of Boston, Mass., five hundred thousand shares of United Bonanza Gold Mining and Milling Co.'s stock, for which I promise to pay twenty-five cents per share in forty-eight hours from date, or return the stock.

(Signed) DAVID R. DECKER.

"Good!" exclaimed E. Tilden. "That's what I call a legal document. Th' other was a gentleman's agreement. There's a world of crime between the two."

THE boy went out with the stock. E. Tilden spent the rest of the afternoon and evening playing bottle-pool with the night clerk.

He found his bed, winked at it, crept upon all fours and grabbed it, despite the quantity of whisky muddling his intentions. He slept with his hat on, and his shoes pointed toward the ceiling. When he awoke, fire-bells were ringing as if the end of the world had come. Men were shouting below his window. They seemed to be running one way. A hose-cart went by with a blare of horns and trumpets. He rolled over for a deeper sleep. It was then,

through the open window he heard: "Deacon Decker's house is on fire."

The jump E. Tilden made would have done credit to an acrobat. He landed on a rag carpet, hastily dressed and bounded down the steps into the smoke-filled street where a chemical engine had just passed with the noise of a calliope. He ran till he came to a hedge, beyond which a glow shot round as from the crater of Vesuvius. He crawled through and crossed the blazing lawn and thrust himself among all the surging crowd.

It was breaking dawn before the searchers ventured after into the furnace of live coals for the missing Deacon. E. Tilden snatched up an axe with sudden ardor. He led the force. He passed into what was once the hall and parlor, on into a big space that had been a library. But there was no trace of the Deacon. Not anywhere. He had vanished as completely as if his house had been a crematorium.

A solemn little procession returned to town, but E. Tilden Tidd of Chicago and Boston, was not one of the mourners. He knew better, and his opinions were terse and exact. It was delivered beside a creek, where he plucked at the petals of a black-eyed Susan.

"I've been double-crossed, diamond-hitched an' whipsawed. I've been euchered an' dealt from the bottom. Th' wheel of life was needled, an' the cards were stacked. Th' Deacon sold th' stock to somebody and decamped with th' kale. He's left me to hold th' bag. I can't cross th' state line. I ain't got a kopeck. Th' flowers are ordered for my finish!"

E. TILDEN'S room in the Eagle House of Mount Calm had shrunk in size as he entered. He drew off his coat and crawled under the covers of the lumpy bed. He felt like a man who had won a fortune in a bucket-

shop and found that somebody had kicked the bucket and upset all his calculations.

The event of the fire, and the disappointment which followed had acted as a deadening narcotic. E. Tilden drowsed and dreamed. He heard the far-off ringing of the dinner-bell, and slept on through the afternoon of a hot day in the shade.

IT was evening before he woke for the last time. He pried one eye open, and groaned at the thought of what might have been and what really was.

E. Tilden reached and pressed the button at the head of the bed, for an order of a quart of whisky and a tumbler. The clerk returned without the whisky. "There's a lady, Miss Janesay, downstairs, to see you," he said.

"Damn Miss Janesay!" exclaimed E. Tilden, then relented. "No, don't! Tell her I'm sick. Tell her I got the measles an' th' smallpox an' th' seven-year itch. D'ye hear me? Tell her I got Asiatic cholera!"

"All right, sir," answered the clerk, jerking his head from the crack of the door as E. Tilden bent for a mis-sile.

The fugitive's mind worked in a circle. He was beaten! The best thing to do was to take stock. He was not going to die in that hotel. He didn't intend to drink that same brand of whisky all the time. It was made in the cellar. One thought rankled after every other thought had died. The clerk had volunteered the information that the entire town was in mourning over Deacon Decker. E. Tilden wondered why it wasn't celebrating.

It was on the second day after the fire that he noticed a bouquet of daisies gracing the tiny washstand. It had been freshly watered. His eyes widened as he attempted to fathom the reason for its presence.

He had not ordered it. He pressed the bell. He chuckled dryly when the clerk came in with a bottle of whisky upon a tray.

"Set it down," he ordered with good humor. "Set it right there. Now tell me, who sent th' daisies?"

The clerk lifted his eyebrows. "Miss Janesay sent them, sir."

"I thought so," said E. Tilden in an aside. "That's all," he added.

NO sooner had the door slammed shut than he threw the covers up over the gas-jet. He was across the floor. He regarded himself in the cracked mirror. "A shave," he chirped. "A general clean-up. My duds pressed, an' a red tie, an'—an', why, you old rounder, there's hope for the wicked, yet! No man is beat till he says he is. I ain't said it! I ain't going to say it, either!"

That night E. Tilden sauntered over to the farm, and found the spinster upon the porch. Her clasp, though cold, was strong. He wasted no time. He offered her love in oily conversation that oozed from his tongue and honeyed the air. He ran the gamut of his mining experience. He gilded the time till he had found coal and oil indications on the slopes of Mount Calm. He dwelt with fervor, upon the advantages of rural life. He intimated, as he parted from her, that more glowing words would be forthcoming in his next visit.

"She may be worth a fortune," he concluded, "but th' only way for me to get a peek at it, is to marry her. I've got to go in for th' truly rural. I've got to try th' bucolic and th' pastoral. I'm going to be a gentleman-farmer. I've got to forget th' Wilfrey-tables for th' moon-tables, high-grade ore for th' real wealth. I'm goin' to play possum, an' learn in my old age what I ought to have learned in younger days. That Deacon was shavin' notes when I was a

shaver. He was learning weasel words before I was weaseled. I wonder how th' old rascal came to overlook Sarah?"

E. TILDEN nursed very few delusions. He had been in a hard world too long to see visions or dream dreams. Sarah, he knew, was a quince and a lemon. She had reached the sad and awkward age. Her heart beat for nickels and pennies. She was the town's only miser since the departure of the deacon. His life would be sad with her. It would be sadder without. He resolved to pop the question and take the consequences. Her securities were in the vault of the bank. It was the only way for him to clutch them.

He made the plunge and fawned into her face as the color mounted up through her wrinkles. He was not a novice at this sort of thing. Intuition and a knowledge of women had served him before in nefarious projects. Once a judge had stated that he had three wives. This was not proven, however, despite the fact that the jury hung in the Scotch verdict of six to six.

Her answer was long in coming.

She temporized over the period of days. She cast the die finally when she said:

"Yes, Tildy, dear. Won't we be so happy?"

Then she took Tildy to the bank to convince him of their happiness.

THE bank cashier, who was also custodian of the safe-deposit vaults, ushered Sarah Janesay and E. Tilden down into a cool vault where he opened a circular door and aided Sarah to unlock her deposit box.

E. Tilden stared over his wife's shoulder as she lifted out a sheath of gilt-edged certificates tied with red ribbons. His eyes began to pop from his head; he reeled and clutched the bank cashier.

"What's the matter?" asked Sarah. "Why, Tildy, what has happened to you?"

"Is that your entire investment?"

"Yes, Tildy. I bought these from Deacon Decker."

E. TILDEN TIDD recrossed the state line in the dark of that night. He did not care where the morning found him. Some day he would meet the Deacon again. . . . some day. . . .



The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life

AS RELATED BY
MADGE KENNEDY

(Star of "Beware of Widows" at Maxine Elliott's Theatre.)

to
BIDE DUDLEY

This is the first of a series of genuine mystery stories, from the lives of famous people of the stage and screen.

MYSTERY to Madge Kennedy, popular star of polite comedy, is something to which she gives but little thought. Those who know Miss Kennedy well see in her a practical girl, one devoted to her husband, her home and her art; one to whom all things are real. A ghost story to her is merely a piece of fiction intended to help while away a few minutes through the creation of temporary interest—just as does a modern best-seller. It presents no problem for her to unravel. It is like an ice-cream soda—good while it lasts, but devoid of future value. In other words, Madge Kennedy, in private life Mrs. Harold Bolster, is a matter-of-fact young person always looking ahead at the practical, with little time for what may seem unreal.

The foregoing doesn't mean there have not been unexplained incidents in the life of the actress. There have been several. But no importance, other than that of an unsolved puzzle, has attached itself to them so far as she has been concerned.

"My husband and I once slept in

a house reputed to be haunted," said she recently. "I had been told a ghost was there, but wasn't bothered. There had been a murder in the building, I believe, and according to the stories of the neighbors, the spectre of the dead girl had a habit of appearing nightly and making noises. I did not dispute their tales—merely looked on them as interesting fiction, and was not in the least disturbed when it became necessary for Mr. Bolster and me to spend the night in the haunted house.

"However, I will admit I experienced a thrill during the early hours of the morning. It was one of curiosity more than of fear and the practical manner in which Mr. Bolster treated the matter not only made me smile but resolved itself into a bit of philosophy I have never forgotten.

"We went to bed about eleven o'clock. Somewhere around two a. m. we both were awakened by a strange noise in the adjoining room, which was the parlor, as it was called. I sat right up in bed; Mr. Bolster merely smiled.

"What was that?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "If it was a burglar we may have trouble on our hands, but if it was a ghost we're all right. Go to sleep."

"I returned to my pillow and knew no more until broad daylight. Then we discovered there was a cat in the next room. It probably had jumped off something, making the mysterious noise."

EVEN though Miss Kennedy is prone to regard mysteries with such complacency, she acknowledges one she is puzzled over. It involves the presence in her jewel-box of a strange ring. She showed it to me at her home, 82 Riverside Drive, recently, after we had discussed mystery, over a delicious little luncheon.

The ring is of hammered silver, rather heavy, and set with an amethyst. It might have been made for a man's little finger, or any finger on the hand of a woman of average weight. Its value is probably in the neighborhood of \$75, although Miss Kennedy never has taken time to settle this point. The ring isn't hers, she says, and she has no idea whose property it is. And now for the story of its presence in her possession.

"I was playing in 'Badges,' a sort of mystery-comedy by Max Marcin, with Gregory Kelly opposite me, when the ring appeared," she said. "It was in Chicago last April. You may remember that Hurtig & Seaman, the producers, selected me for the rôle of the girl in this play after they had tried several others. The part appealed to me and one reason was its mysterious features. I don't mean that real mystery intrigues me, but this was of the stage sort and was mysterious only to the audience. After a good run in New York we went to Chicago for an engagement.

"My mother was with me and, knowing we would be in Chicago some time, we took an apartment in the

Blackstone Hotel. Another member of my party was my French maid. Now here are some facts I must set down before I proceed, in order that the reader will realize the ring is the center of a real mystery:

"I had never had a ring of the sort, neither had my mother or my maid. The chambermaid who looked after our apartment was old and fat. She could not have owned such a ring; in fact, she denied strenuously ever having seen it—no one, other than my little family and the chambermaid ever entered our rooms. So far so good!

"One day, as I was leaving for a matinee, I opened a drawer in my dresser, lifted the flap, if that is the word, of my lace handkerchief-holder and took a 'kerchief. There was nothing unusual in that, and I noticed nothing unusual anywhere, even to the slightest degree. After the matinee I returned to my room and decided I needed another 'kerchief. Again I opened the drawer and once more lifted the lace flap. There, on top of my supply of handkerchiefs, was the ring. I called my maid.

"'Here's your ring, Marie,' I said, never for one moment suspecting it belonged to anybody else. She said it was not hers. I called the chambermaid.

"'Here's your ring, Mrs. Dugan,' I said, offering it to her.

"'And you would call that ring mine, eh?' she replied, with a broad Irish accent. 'Tis not the likes of me that owns such a queer-lookin' thing.'

"I turned to my maid again and asked who had been in the room during my absence. She said, 'Absolutely no one.' Furthermore, she was positive in her assertion that she had not left the suite. My mother, of course, knew nothing of the ring, or its presence in the drawer. I took the matter up with the management of the hotel, but there was no explanation

for the problem coming. It was then that the mystery element surrounding the ring awed Marie and Mrs. Dugan.

"Well, Marie," I said, "I don't know how it got in my drawer and I don't want it. You may have it."

"In excitable French she declined to have anything to do with it. Next, I tried to give it to the chambermaid, but Mrs. Dugan, knowing the story of its discovery, refused even to touch it. Then I sat down and tried to reason out an explanation for the whole affair. The windows had all been locked; no bell-boys, I was told, had been in the apartment that day and, so far as I could see, no locks had been picked. On my dressing-table were valuable gold 'beauty implements' which had not been disturbed. In all there was about \$1,000 worth of things within two feet of the drawer, yet none was missing. No, it couldn't have been a thief who left the ring, so I gave up trying to solve the mystery.

"That night I wore the ring to the theatre just to show it to the other members of the company and ask their ideas about the problem. They had none. After the performance that evening a box of flowers was delivered in my dressing-room. They were beautiful pink roses.

"Harold hasn't forgotten his little wife," I gurgled joyfully, as I cut the string. But they weren't from Harold. There was a card in the box on which was written:

"Compliments of Mr. and Mrs. Ring."

"I asked the stage-door man who had left the box. He said it had been delivered by a messenger boy. He had neglected to notice the company's name on his cap. I knew of no 'Mr. and Mrs. Ring.' Vaguely there came into my mind a sort of connection between the flowers and the mysterious ring. However, there was no ex-

planation at hand, so I just had to let the matter drop.

"When, after several days, I had found not the slightest hint of a reason for the presence of the ring in my dresser drawer, I advertised it in the newspapers. There was no response. A few evenings later a box of fine candy was left at the theatre for me. There was a card in it on which was printed, with a pen:

"Good luck!—Ring."

"No one connected with the playhouse could remember who had delivered the candy. I was a bit wary about the gift. I had heard of people receiving poisoned candy in the mails and otherwise and, while I knew of no reason why anybody should want to kill me, I didn't eat a single piece that night. I left the box in my room and when I awoke next day found that Marie had eaten half a dozen pieces. She had suffered no ill effects, so I indulged and, together, we ate all the bonbons the box contained.

"No more 'Ring' happenings took place for about a week. Then one day, while in my apartment, I was summoned to the telephone. A man was at the other end of the wire.

"Is this Miss Madge Kennedy, actress?" he asked in a very business-like tone.

"Yes," I replied. "Who is calling?"

"Have you the ring?" he asked, ignoring my question.

"The ring?" At first I was bewildered by his brusque manner. Then the thought of my mysterious ring came with a rush.

"Yes," I replied, eager with curiosity. "Is it yours?"

"No, Miss Kennedy. I am merely checking up. Goodby!"

"He hung up the receiver. Almost breathless with excitement, I asked the girl at the hotel's switchboard to trace the call. She did so and found

it had come from a public booth in a drugstore on State Street."

AT this point the maid entered with Miss Kennedy's coat, indicating it was time she started for her matinee of "Beware of Widows."

"So," she continued, as she slipped into the fur garment, "you know as much as I do about my mysterious ring. You've seen it and you've heard my story. How did it get into my dresser drawer and why has no one claimed it? What do you think?"

"Frankly, I'm stumped for anything that approaches a real theory," I replied. "And yet there's one I might enter as a mere guess."

"As?"

"Well, I once heard of a college boy who, in order to qualify for membership in a Fraternity, had to get into the presence of Lillian Russell at her hotel, kiss her and bring back proof of the kiss. Miss Russell saw the fun

of it, kissed him and gave him a note vowing their lips had met."

"But how did he get into her room? She always kept herself in seclusion as much as possible."

"Yes, she was pretty well guarded. The story was, he had to work a week as a bellboy."

Miss Kennedy slowly shook her head.

"No," she said, "that theory doesn't fit my case. The ring is too valuable to be used in a Fraternity prank."

As we drove away in the car we changed the subject. I had no other suggestion to make as a solution for the ring problem.

Perhaps readers of MYSTERY MAGAZINE have one?

I'm sure Miss Kennedy would like to know.

[The second story of this series will be told by Mary and Florence Nash. It will appear in our next issue, out February 15.]



THE TRAP

By GRACE LOVELL BRYAN

MARGOT BRANDT telephoned me, asking that I come to her the following day at Sablecroft, the Brandt home on the South Shore of Long Island, her low, vibrant voice saying that it was a matter of life or death.

I gasped, holding the receiver to my ear. Life or death! What had happened—what climax in the myriad cases with whose strangeness Margot, with her tall sinuousness, her beauty of cornflower eyes and night-black hair, her mouth generous and delicately curved like a warm flower in the creamy pallor of her face knew how to deal with! I waited tensely for her answer.

Spirituelle, often ascetic, possessing an intuitive ability to divine the imminence of evil in the mental vibrations about her, Margot sought motive and clue in the mechanism of the human mind, especially that major part, the subconscious. "Wrest its hidden fear," was her ever recurrent formula, "and you have won your victory." It was her unusual gifts that had proved the truth of her theory, raising her to the rank of Chief of the Slawton Agency, which had become a power in the realm of deduction.

"Who is it, Margot?" I asked.

"Eloise Kenhardt. You'll come?"

I promised, and with a grave "Thank you!" she rang off, and I sat thinking of Eloise Kenhardt, whose strange action, immediately after her second marriage to Dr. Francis Kenhardt, had been the subject of countless conjectures, when, gay, lovely, at twenty, and seemingly on

the threshold of happiness, she had suddenly shut herself behind locked doors of her home, where for two years she had refused all human contact save that of her husband and a few servants. To all visitors, the message was delivered that Mrs. Kenhardt could see no one.

The windows of her apartment were heavily shrouded, and the whole house, in emulation of its mistress' gesture, had become a place of gloom. Lights were kept burning all night, and a servant was ordered to be within call, always, so that Eloise should never be left alone. No one of her myriad friends had caught even a glimpse of her face since the beginning of her strange seclusion. As far as the world was concerned, Eloise Kenhardt was dead.

WHAT was wrong? What mysterious circumstance had arisen to occasion such an act? Margot, perplexed, worried, for Eloise was one of her dearest friends, had gone to Doctor Kenhardt, but, though seemingly deeply grieved and mortified by his wife's conduct, he could give no explanation except that of nerves, for which he was treating her.

But with that solution of the matter Margot had not been satisfied. And yet, investigating every channel through which the motive for Eloise's inexplicable retirement might be learned, she had discovered nothing. Appealing to Eloise's nurse who had been with her since her mistress' birth, she found that Eloise shrank from her in terror when the old woman had begged her for an explanation, refusing to allow her to even

speak before her again. Then, breaking into sobs, the nurse had cried out to Margot:

"Oh, Miss Brandt, save her, save her!" And had gone away, weeping.

Save her—from what? Again I reviewed in my mind the circumstances leading to her curious withdrawal from society. A motherless daughter of an old New York family, Eloise had been the joyous leader of the younger *débutantes*, her escapades wild and daring, yet softened by the sweetness of her nature which was especially winning, with a deep loyalty to those she loved that had brought about her first marriage, for her father, bankrupt, had forced her to marry Geoffrey Wilton, the multimillionaire steel magnate, although her heart had already been given to Richard Mason, a young architect.

Three months after the wedding Wilton, while alone in his plane, had met his death in an accident on the sea near his country home, leaving Eloise sole heir and mistress of her future; and it seemed as though Fate had taken a hand in the lovers' behalf. Then, without explanation of any kind, she had remarried, not Richard Mason, but Francis Kenhardt, who had been her husband's secretary.

FRANCIS KENHARDT, a former physician, specializing in neurotic diseases, had, on Geoffrey's marriage, given up his practice to take up his post with Wilton, who was very fond of him. The financier had given him, I recalled, as an especial mark of friendship, an unusual charm, of a peculiar Maltese design, made from a drawing of a young artist friend killed in the Argonne. Kenhardt wore the charm constantly on his watch and seemed devoted to the elder man, from whom he was rarely separated.

We might have argued that proximity had triumphed over her

love for Dick, for Kenhardt lived at the Wilton home, had we not known that Eloise loathed Kenhardt.

On the day preceding Wilton's death, she had come to Sablecroft to spend the night with Margot, and had told of her dislike, a hatred so intense that she had asked Wilton to dismiss him, which he had refused.

Had the pendulum of the heart, so delicately balanced between love and hate, then swung toward the softer emotion, explaining her marriage, I puzzled, as I brushed my bobbed brown hair and made ready for my journey to Long Island? Yet why her strange seclusion afterward, which had continued for two years?

Were we to solve the mystery at Sablecroft?

NEXT day Margot's car met me at Croft Manor. Clouds had gathered over us like a black pall, bringing rain, and we ploughed through a storm that seemed to increase in fury. As we neared Sablecroft, the huge house, like a castle with its stone towers built upon rock, where Margot lived the year around with her brother Meredith, I thought looked unusually bleak and forbidding, as though disaster were lurking within its dark walls.

Margot greeted me in the wide hall, and her beauty seized upon me afresh; the eyes, wide apart, peering gravely beneath the straight line of brows, their color deepened by the invariable blue she always wore. As usual, her queenliness quenched my own piquancy.

"What is it?" I asked, as she went with me to my room, with its gay chintz and walnut. A cozy fire burned in the huge grate. "What have you heard of Eloise?" I cried eagerly, holding my hands to the grateful blaze.

"She is here," Margot answered quietly.

"Eloise?" I gasped. "Here? You have brought her out of her prison, after all this time? Oh, Margot, how did you manage? Tell me!"

"I pleaded with Doctor Kenhardt, and he promised. He brought her this morning. I have seen her." Margot stared beyond me, and gave a shudder. I laid my hand on her arm.

"What is it—what is wrong?" I asked anxiously.

She shook her head, with a little gesture put out her hand, as though trying to brush away some impalpable barrier, and her eyes clouded.

"There is something terribly wrong—evil. I feel it—like a heavy hand. It came into this house, today."

"Is she ill?"

"There is no illness like a mind diseased."

"But," I gasped, "but——"

"No, there is no coercion." She answered my unspoken question as she often did. "I have verified that. Eloise alone is responsible for her action these past two years, the lights burning all night, the locked doors, the shrinking from all human contact." Margot paused, her face tensed. "She looks as one who knew herself unutterably lost!"

I sat staring at Margot. "Oh, save her, save her!" I cried, and realized that I was repeating the words of Eloise's nurse. And I felt chilled.

BELLS rang below, and the honk of motors sounded from the driveway.

Margot rose. I dressed hurriedly, feeling a sudden desire for companionship. Eloise here! What word would she have for us, what explanation for inexplicable action? Or were we to be thwarted in all efforts to find out the truth?

I made my way down the winding stairs, hung with rare tapestries. A chandelier of crystal pendants that

Margot had brought from Alexandria darted its light into the well of gloom below, in which a huge Buddha kept guard, immobile and all-knowing.

As I entered the living-room Berte Roberts waved a greeting to me from the depths of a tapestry chair where she cuddled, bewitching in peach taffeta. George Roberts, her husband, short and fat, grinned from the phonograph where he was industriously turning over records.

Beyond, on a huge davenport, was Carter Budd, a friend of Eloise's mother, saturnine dramatic critic for *The Day*. Teddy Cartwright and Elma Rogers, olive-faced beauty in red sequins, Eloise's school chum, shuffled the mah-jong tiles.

"George is murdering the canned melody as usual, Katherine," informed Berte. "Husbands have little variety. Ever since we piled in this morning he's played the Volga Boat song."

Meredith Brandt found me a chair, and I sat down, smiling at these friends of Eloise, then with difficulty suppressed a start as Richard Mason's unhappy young face turned toward me, in a grimace of welcome.

Dick! Eloise's rejected lover! Why had Margot called him, I wondered, as he slumped again into his chair near the piano, like a wounded animal, I fancied, unable to rise. Then I followed his gaze, and saw Eloise, who sat shrinking within the pillows of the chaise longue, as behind some availing fortress. Eloise—but what a change! I stared, aghast.

A CLUTCH of horror seized me, for the vivid loveliness and vitality that had once been hers had died, as though stricken by some hideous blight. Her brown eyes were dull, deep-ringed; even her red hair that had glowed like an aureole of burnished fire seemed quenched, as

though the flame within had burned out. Her mouth was fixed in a smile, as though conscious that some mask must be worn against the world, but the paint of her lips only served to accentuate the shocking pallor of her thin face, on which sat that look of which Margot had spoken.

WHAT had happened? I knew that the same question was in all our minds as we played the game of pretense, that all was usual; that no need for alarm existed; talking eagerly, as though in an effort to keep things going, which our own horror might plunge into silence. Elma sprang up and played a piano accompaniment to the phonograph.

Was this merely shattered nerves, as Doctor Kenhardt had said? I stared at Eloise. A curious lifelessness was about her, as though the will to live had gone; yet at the same time her body seemed consumed by some hidden fever.

She came from highly-strung stock, an excitable strain. Yet was that the explanation? She went, I knew, for days without sleeping; then walked in her sleep. I thought she now had the look of a *sleep-walker*, as her eyes stared past me; yet they were bent, I saw, on some definite object.

She was looking at the clock on the mantel, her expression agonized, as though some gigantic destiny was controlled by the movement of its hands. As I looked, I had an impression of something fearful, as of a cat, ready to spring. Which way, I wondered—forward, or back? For what was she waiting?

"KENHARDT has a nice day for his trip back to town, hasn't he?" said Berte. "Poor man, what a flood!"

"Yes. Telegram came calling him back immediately after he had arrived this morning," Meredith ex-

plained to me. "Back tonight, though."

"Oh, yes!" Eloise turned to Meredith wildly. "He must come tonight!" Her eyes rested upon him pleadingly, as though begging for confirmation of her statement, her desire.

Then, as though conscious of unwonted vehemence, she shrank back again on the longue, her hands picking at the green ostrich of her jeweled fan. Forgetting us, her eyes again returned, as though by some magnet, to the clock. Suddenly I had a sense of waiting, as one listens for the clock to strike, knowing the approach of the hour, as Margot entered the wide hall beyond.

She came toward us. At that moment Eloise sprang up and stood gazing at the door which led into the outer hall, as though trying to pierce through the heavy wood at something we could not see. Richard half rose, his eyes upon the woman he loved, unconscious of anyone but her.

The door opened, and Francis Kenhardt came in, and I wondered how she could have heard him, for there had been no sound. Perhaps her desire had leaped the barrier of material things.

"'LO, FOLKS," he grinned, his handsome face wreathed with boyish smiles.

I noted again the attractiveness of his blond hair, the blue eyes and his fine mouth, sensitive yet firm, and did not wonder at our surrender to his charm.

Everyone called a riotous greeting. Berte smiled ravisly, and Elma bent upon him her most coquettish look as George and Ted made way for him before the grate fire. He was a general favorite.

"Now we can have a li'l harmony," George announced gratifiedly. "Come

on, fellows, Ken's got a bunch of good songs."

"Well, do let him sit down a minute," protested Berte. "'Tittle mans been to New York, and hims tired."

"Francis!" Eloise put her hand on his arm, looking wildly up at him, her lips parted, her whole attitude one of strained intensity.

He patted her hand as though to soothe a child. "No, dear," he said quietly, in answer to some unspoken question, "I couldn't do it. Let me tell you, it's great little weather for ducks," he chuckled, turning to the others as he sank with a sigh of relief into a huge arm chair. "Park Avenue's running rivers. I thought I'd have to call out my launch before I got through!"

Eloise stood where he had left her, as though stricken by some blow. What was it, I wondered, that she expected of Kenhardt? What was it that he "couldn't do"?

He did not glance toward her again, as he mixed a hot drink from the tea-cart which was rolled in by the servant, his face gay, good-humored.

"I'm glad you didn't get wet, Doctor Kenhardt." Margot's azure robe gleamed in the firelight. "By the way, that Maltese charm Geoffrey gave you—I always thought it so unique, that curious effect of the scrolled arrows——" She glanced inquiringly toward his coat.

"Yes, it was unique," Kenhardt answered ruefully, "no other copy of it in existence, you know. But I lost it. Don't know how or where. Absolutely disappeared. Advertised, of course, and all that, but nothing ever came of it." His ruddy face sobered. "I suppose it dropped off on Madison; mobs in the Forties are getting beyond bounds nowadays. But I was dreadfully cut up over its loss," his blue eyes saddened. "It was Geoffrey's gift! Seems awful to have lost that—too!"

ELOISE sank into her chair again, staring out beyond the room, as though at some horrible vision we could not see, the pallor of her face shocking, as she sat oblivious to everything about her except that which seemed to hold her in its grip. What had happened in these few moments to have created such a look, I wondered?

Then I saw that Margot, too, was watching her; saw the fingers of her hands move restlessly, her shoulders straighten in the way they had when marching toward the objective point of her attack, and I knew that the moment for which I waited had arrived.

"Rain, in November," Margot said. She sank dreamily into a huge chair drawn up beneath the immobile Buddha. "I've often thought it like the weeping of the dead; a lament for the blindness of mortals who cannot hear the message they try to send across."

"Message? You mean haunt?" Berte inquired, shivering. She gave a sudden shriek as a boom of thunder sounded, then laughed nervously. The jangling of bells of a Hindu affair that told the hour followed eerily.

"Yes. And that reminds me of something I was once interested in, happening not so long ago. Do you care to hear it?" Margot smiled upon us.

Was this to be Eloise's story, I wondered, this thing she was to tell? Were we before the curtain of the coming drama, the denouement that would reveal Eloise's secret?

There came a chorus of "Yes!"

"The crime, the killing of James Caffron, was rather an unusual one in the way it was brought about," Margot continued. "He was murdered by his wife." She turned her head slowly; her eyes sought Eloise, an inscrutable look in their depths, and I knew that this tale of murder held the mystery of Eloise! Murder!

My pulses tensed. What had Eloise to do with such a crime as that?

THERE was a moment's pause while Carter Budd lit another cigar, and George settled on the divan to listen. Kenhardt, leaning back in his chair, waited with attentive interest upon Margot. And for the first time Eloise now turned her eyes upon her friend.

I saw a sudden contraction of her painted mouth, as she clapped the ice-green tulle at her breast with fragile hands. I had a curious impression of held breath, of waiting, as she stared, as though in some paralysis of terror.

Margot turned toward us—"Mrs. Seaton married her daughter, Anna, to the elderly James Caffron and his fortune," she began, "although she was in love with Will Burroughs, of her own age. Having parted with Will in a state of collapse, she grew more miserable as her life with her husband continued.

"Of this feeling, Frederick Greer, Caffron's half-brother, a lean, avaricious little man, soon became aware. There often seems to be an affinity between misery and those people who are evil, that is, an attraction with a philanthropic purpose, the desire of the evil to correct misery, for their own ends.

"Anna met him one day in the hall, and he whispered to her that he knew her secret, that she hated his half-brother.

"You want him to die," he nodded. "Then you would be free. If you got rid of him, you could marry Burroughs."

"Anna cried out at him in terror and turned away, instantly putting his words from her mind as she thought. But she said nothing to Caffron, no doubt because of the knowledge of her own guilt. From time to time Greer repeated his words, always in the same key. Then an in-

itation came to visit at a friend's house, and she felt unutterable relief."

Margot smoothed her gleaming hair with a slim hand, moved slightly in her chair, as she continued:

"Once more Frederick Greer spoke. He told her that Caffron was to spend that night at his country house.

"He is in your way, Anna. He will not give you a divorce, because of his religion, so you are tied for life. Think of it, day after day, year after year, dragging themselves out beside him. Why not be free?" He smiled meaningly. Again Anna left him in horror and started to her friend's home.

"She had not more than reached her destination, in a state of nervous collapse, when Caffron, blind to her dislike of him, telephoned, telling her, as Greer had already informed her, that he would spend the night at their country house, a few miles distant from her friend's, and was coming to take breakfast next morning with them both.

"And so Anna went to bed that night on the verge of hysteria. The impossibility of escape from him, even for a day, was gone. She had not slept for three nights, she told her friend, and she hoped at last sleep would come to help her forget her unhappiness.

"Then, as though they had been written in letters of fire, there came to her mind Greer's words, which she had thought forgotten. 'Why not get rid of him, and you can marry Burroughs . . . He is in your way. Be free!'

"Suggestion is very potent, and as we know every thought and deed of ours is held in the subconscious. So now, over and over again, they came to repeat themselves, as though waiting for this hour. She tried to battle with them, conquer this force within

her, urging her to evil; but it was too strong.

"And so, at three o'clock, she rose, flung on her coat, and went down to the garage. It was raining, but she did not heed it as she set off in her car to the country house where lay the man she hated.

"In the driveway, she turned off the motor, then went into the house to the kitchen and searched through the drawers of the cabinets; then ascended the stairs, the handle of the thing she had thought for her purpose clicking against the sides of the banisters, to the room facing the river where Caffron slept, and plunged her knife into his body."

"Nice, helpful little party," interposed George Roberts ironically.

"Rather horrible, I should say," Elma observed with a shiver.

"After two hours," Margot continued, "Anna wrapped her cloak around her soiled gown and hands and returned to her friend's house. As she left the scene of her crime, Frederick Greer stepped out of the shadows where he had witnessed this fulfillment of his plan.

"Next morning, when Anna learned of his knowledge, she was in a state of frenzy. But Greer proposed to take things into his hands, with a way out.

"Announcing in town Caffron's previous departure for Europe, he had the house boarded up, and accompanied Anna to Switzerland, where, as he had given out, they were to join Caffron. There he lived on the fruits of blackmail, which had been his original design.

"So seven years went by. Then Anna made a mistake." Margot dusted the ashes of her cigarette into a nearby tray, her blue eyes on the red square of polished floor. "She allowed the country house to pass out of her hands. We forget the dead—but the dead return!"

CARTER BUDD moved uneasily in his chair. We saw that Eloise sat staring at Margot as one who had looked on some hideous Gorgon's head and been turned to stone might. And I knew now the meaning of the expression that sat master of her face. It was Fear. Yet of what could she be afraid? What terrible circumstance had occurred to bring such horror upon her soul? I felt chilled, alarmed, as I looked at Eloise, who now, as though unconscious of what she did, began to beat her hands ceaselessly against her breast.

I saw my anxiety reflected on all our faces, the racked gaze of Richard whose heart lay in his eyes. I leaned forward. There seemed something electric in the air, and I waited; it seemed that I did not breathe.

"DO you believe in that sort of thing?" Doctor Kenhardt's warm, magnetic voice penetrated the tension with a soothing effect; "the return of departed spirits? Of course Lodge says——"

"Mind is always with us," Margot answered. "It is the only substance. Thought cannot die. All the thoughts of the millions who have lived during the ages are present now in the air. There is *no release* for them. And sometimes they try to get across the border-line which separates us and them."

She paused a moment, silent. The monotonous sound of the rain against the dripping panes grew louder, as though charged with sudden venom, and the pale face of the Buddha seemed to lean forward menacingly.

Return! I stared at Margot. Did she mean that Geoffrey Wilton would return from the depths of the sea from which his body had never been recovered?—for the wrecked plane had been tragic evidence of his fate.

"A family named McLeod bought

the Caffron place," she went on. "It was to them Caffron came, endlessly reconstructing the details of his murder, to make them understand; trying to get across.

"The family worked very late the first day of their arrival, and a younger boy was sent up to the small bedroom beside the river. When he arrived there, he heard the beating of heavy rain against the shingled roof and windows, then above the rain, the whir of an auto coming along the road in front of the house.

"He listened as the car turned into the driveway, and then the noise stopped, as though the motor had been turned off.

"The boy wondered who could be coming at such an hour, for it was late, and the house was on an unfrequented road. He took out his watch. Half-past three. Running to the window, he looked out, but there was no auto. Then he stared up at the sky, and saw with amazement that the moon was shining. There had been no rain.

"Frightened, he ran downstairs to tell his mother. She laughed at him, thinking he had imagined it all.

"The following night Mrs. McLeod herself slept in the small bedroom, and she, too, heard the same things, the ghostly rain beating down upon roof and window, the whir of the motor.

"Then, from below, the noise of table drawers being opened in the kitchen, and a faint clinking of cutlery, as though someone were searching through them; the sound of footsteps coming up the wide stairway, accompanied by a soft click-click, as when a child holds a stick against the pickets of a banister." Margot's eyes strayed toward Eloise a moment, the sound of Anna's knife; returning after seven years.

A blue-veined hand crept now to Eloise's throat; her form grew rigid.

"Mrs. McLeod called her husband, but the kitchen was as they had left it," Margot continued, "the cutlery undisturbed; so he derided the idea of anything supernatural. As the time went on, they got used to the sounds, which continued night after night, and slept through them.

"But, finally, it was Mr. McLeod who at last received the message, for within him came a desire to raise the house; the place had no cellar. There, under the living-room floor . . . " Margot paused, for Eloise had risen to her feet, her eyes distended in fright so patent that it chilled our blood.

She stood, her body swaying, her hands lifted to her breast in a kind of frenzy.

Richard sprang up, his face agonized. "What is it, my darling?" he cried. "What is wrong?"

"Eloise!" Kenhardt called sharply.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned, hopelessly, staring out at that hideous unseen vision of hers, "oh, my God!"

KENHARDT laid his hand on her shoulder, but she paid no attention, did not seem to be conscious of anything except that horror in her soul. And, as though waiting for this moment, Margot put out her arms to Eloise, forcing her body toward her, her blue eyes black with intensity.

"Of what are you afraid?" she cried.

Eloise's eyes clung to Margot's, her lips parted, but nothing came save a convulsive gasp.

"You have been afraid, ever since that telegram came this morning telling you of the sale of that house," Margot went on, "the house you deeded to your husband and sold without your knowledge—which you have been trying to buy back!"

Buy back! The trip to town, Eloise's question, and Kenhardt's answer, "I couldn't do it," rose to my

mind. So that was what he had been attempting.

"You hated Geoffrey! Now you are afraid that the thing which happened to Anna Caffron will come to you!"

Margot bent nearer her. Her voice shot out like an accusing finger. "Wilton stood in your way, Eloise! He wasn't killed at sea! Through Kenhardt's need for money, I bought that house—and I have found what I sought—Geoffrey——"

A gasping, choking cry interrupted her, horrible to hear. Eloise's face contorted in a spasm of terror; she flung out her hands wildly. Then, with a little moan, her body seemed to crumple, as she said in a tired voice:

"Oh, it isn't any use. He is there, in that house. I killed him."

A GASP trailed through the room. Eloise a murderess!

Margot had procured a confession, but sacrificed her friend. I turned away from the look on Richard's face. Eloise . . . her unhappiness with Wilton . . . "the way out," in her mind. Had she, like Anna, been unable to battle the desire of her subconscious mind?

"Oh, I'm glad it's over," Eloise cried. She put her hand over her eyes a moment, then went on: "That is why I kept away from everyone, shut myself up." She sank into a chair, as though her limbs had given way.

"You know all, Margot; you have told it. I had come that day to your house, as the woman you spoke of just now." She stopped, her face piteous, then went on, speaking dully, mechanically, as though she were reciting the story of someone else.

"I went to the country place where Geoffrey was that night, to ask him to let me be free. I saw a revolver on the table beside his bed and I shot him. He clutched at me and tore a piece of my dress . . . then, they were

remodeling the house, and there was an open space under the living-room downstairs, and I . . ." She shuddered, then went on: "My dress is in his hand—*now!*"

WE STARED at Eloise, gripped by overwhelming sympathy, and I felt an impulse of revolt against the cruelty of justice. Then I stared bewilderedly, for Meredith, at a sign from Margot, advanced swiftly; there was a scuffle, and in the center of the room stood Doctor Francis Kenhardt, handcuffed, with Meredith, a smile on his face, adjusting his ruffled clothes.

"Here is Geoffrey's murderer," said Margot, her voice exultant. We watched, gasping.

"Kenhardt!" sputtered George Roberts.

"How dare you!" Kenhardt snarled. "This is an outrage!" His ruddy face was distorted with an angry glare as he stood with clenched fists held out, the veins rising on his handsome forehead like huge cords. "What is the meaning of this?"

"You shall soon know." Margot's eyes rested on him as he stood in an attitude of haughty defiance. "I went to you, and I sensed evil. Its vibrations seemed to grow stronger every time I saw you warning me. I felt malevolence assail me, battling with my brain for supremacy.

"Like Frederick Greer, you played on Eloise's mind. You knew of her love for Dick, and taunted her with it, telling her of her dislike for Wilton, insinuating the relief his death would be. But Eloise was innocent!

"It was you who went to the country house and killed Geoffrey, burying his body there, and preparing the evidence of the wrecked plane and his lost body!"

"Do you think I'm going to——" Kenhardt snapped out. Meredith moved threateningly, his jaw shot out, and Kenhardt subsided sullenly.

"I knew your part in it," Margot continued; "but Eloise puzzled me, for I saw that she believed herself guilty. Of what? And why? I wanted to find out the last link that eluded me in the chain. That was why I invited you here, where, in the surroundings she had known the evening before Wilton's death, and during a storm which usually assails the Sound at this period of the year, I told a story of what *she might have done*, to bring out, if I could, the secret fear that was in her mind; and I succeeded!"

Her voice rose triumphantly; her eyes burned on Kenhardt's.

"You told Eloise the details of her confession, knowing her tendency to sleep-walking; that, in her sleep, under the hypnosis of your suggestion, she had gone to the house and murdered her husband. And to prevent her questioning your statement any further, you told her of the piece of dress clutched in Geoffrey's hand, which you had already cut from the gown she wore that night. Having convinced her utterly, you then married her as the price of silence, knowing that grief and remorse were killing her, thus freeing your path to the goal toward which you have worked ever since your hypnosis of Geoffrey Wilton three years before—the mastery of the Wilton fortune!"

Kenhardt moved forward wildly, raised his hands in a menacing gesture, then dropped them. "That's a lie, you four-flusher!" he cried hoarsely, "a bunch of silly lies! I defy you to prove it, or your ridiculous guff about my guilt! It's a lie!"

"Is it?" Margot took something from inside the bosom of her dress and held it a moment hidden against her side as she looked at him, her tall figure like an avenging goddess, her face stern with feeling.

"You prepared a trap, Doctor Ken-

hardt, that has sprung for you. There was no dress in Geoffrey's hand, as you well know; but there was something else. Can you guess what it is?"

Then she held out her hand, and I saw a swift look of apprehension and foreboding pass over Kenhardt's face, as though some mysterious sixth sense had sounded a warning of disaster. As he looked, his face contorted, seemed to grow pinched and small while he stared at the thing before him, mute evidence of his crime, once a gift of love, that, clutched in the dead man's hand, now revealed the identity of his slayer.

For in Margot's outstretched palm lay the Maltese charm.

There was a startled movement through the room, a gasp of horror and relief, and with a little sigh Eloise turned toward Dick as though to her rightful shelter, and I saw the sun rise in a man's face.

Kenhardt bared his teeth in savage defiance as an officer came in at a signal from Meredith, and broke into a loud laugh as he turned contemptuously upon Margot.

"Well, I suppose you think you've got me," he sneered, "but don't think I'm going to take it lying down! Why, you found the charm and planted it in the house to fasten the killing on me, so you could free your friend; that's all! It's a frame-up! But it won't work. Eloise has confessed, and you can't prove her confession a lie!"

"Oh, yes, I can!" Margot's face glowed with victory. "For there was one thing your clever brain forgot. Eloise slept in my house. I, too, knew of her tendency to sleep-walking when under emotional strain; and so that night, as I can easily prove, I locked every exit from her room—*on the outside!*"

Thankfully, I saw that Eloise was free.

The Sphinx Breaks Silence



HAT I have no intention of assuming any of the personality or authority of the Sphinx is at once made evident by the simple circumstance that the Sphinx is a lady. Therefore, at best or worst, I am merely her mouthpiece; and though she has not said so in so many words, she has given me tacitly to understand that, in using the name *Mystery* for this magazine, the publishers are assuming a tremendous responsibility.

This attitude of hers is, of course, perfectly understandable. She is, and has been for Heaven knows how many thousands of years, the most mysterious woman in the world, and anything that takes unto itself the name of *Mystery* is more or less answerable to her for the character and quality of its performance under this title.

However, it is just possible that it was the sand in our January 15 cover design that compelled her, in self-defense, to break her proverbially long silence. She does not care very much for sand. She's seen too much of it. And she thought we might have shown some consideration . . . some modicum of discretion . . . So I hurried the proof of the cover for this issue; and when she saw the cat I knew it was all right. She muttered something about "Bubastis," and sighed a sigh that had the uncomfortable effect of making some thirty or forty centuries seem no longer than half a minute. Then she said, as if she were talking to herself:

"*Mystery* is the mother of Faith and the Father of Ambition. It is in the kernel of the Seed of all Beginning."

And nothing more than this.

At first, the utterance seemed to be rather ambiguous, and more mysteriously ornamental than useful. But a little exposition of the truth soon showed that the lady was right.

There are all kinds and grades of religions in the world simply because life hereafter is the deepest and most impenetrable kind of mystery. Religions of every sort try to interpret this mystery, and Faith is born of an effort to believe in the interpretation. There would be no necessity for faith in anything if everything

were known—if everything and every one were obvious, and reliable beyond even the suggestion of an interrogation-point; which, of course, nothing and no one ever is. Faith is necessary, therefore, only when a reasonable doubt exists; and any kind of reasonable doubt is the nucleus of a mystery. Thus Mystery is the mother of Faith.

Ambition, which is said to be "made of sterner stuff," is really a kind of egotistical curiosity to solve the mystery of Self. A man-child is born, and among the first things he does is to examine his feet. Perhaps he does this because instinct tells him there is a long, rough road ahead of him. In any event, when he begins to travel along that road in something like real earnest, he soon discovers that it is not a private thoroughfare, smoothly macadamized, intended for his use exclusively.

There are other people on that road. Millions of them. And most of them do not seem to like him very much. Apparently they would much prefer it if he would get off the road altogether and drop into the ditch or something. So, when he has been jostled and kicked and stepped upon until he is fed up with the whole business, he comes to the entirely original conclusion that perhaps he *could* get off that road and blaze a new and exclusive trail for himself! Wonderful idea! And whether the new trail is suicide or the road to a presidency and a fortune, each is an experimental lunge into the dark; an effort to solve the eternal mystery of what is in store for *him*.

And what is true of the individual is true of the universe.

Mystery is in the kernel of the Seed of all Beginning.

♦♦♦♦♦

I do not suppose the Lady of the Long Silence will ever so far forget herself as to discuss the magazine with me. She isn't the kind of woman who will discuss anything. She says whatever she has to say and assumes that, having spoken, there is nothing left to be said either for or against.

However, I hope readers of MYSTERY MAGAZINE will not hesitate to say exactly what they think, and I shall welcome every kind of criticism because I believe all criticism is good, if only because it expresses a point of view.

THE EDITOR.

Who Rideth Alone

By PERCIVAL C. WREN

Author of Beau Geste, The Wages of Virtue, Stepsons of France, etc.

A FOUR PART STORY—PART II

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

MAJOR HENRI DE BEAUJOLAIS, of the Spahis and French Secret Service, operating in the French Sudan, tells the story in part.

While a "volontaire" in the Blue Hussars, he fights a duel with a fellow ranker named Becque, who is an Alsatian, part French, part German. Becque is a secret agitator against everything that means discipline and order—particularly in the French Army. De Beaujolais beats Becque and puts an end to his activities for a time; but, years later, hears of him again in Zaguig, a "holy city" on the Algerian fringe of the French Sudan. Quite apparently, Becque is still the venomously active enemy of France.

It is at this time that Major de Beaujolais, entrusted with a secret and extremely dangerous mission to Emir el Hamel el Kabir, the mysterious head of a powerful confederation of desert tribes, is compelled to start out on this mission, encumbered with the responsibility of the lives of Mary Vanbrugh, an American girl, and Maudie Atkinson, her maid. A sudden Moslem uprising and massacre of Christians in Zaguig inflicts this situation upon the Major, who has been most specifically instructed by his uncle, General Bertrand de Beaujolais, to start out with as small a bodyguard as possible and "no encumbrances whatever." Duty first, last and all the time is his uncle's slogan; and in exemplification of this, a certain Captain de Lannec of the Secret Service has just been broken for stepping aside from his duty to rescue a white woman who had been captured by a desert emir and relegated to his harem.

Accompanying Major de Beaujolais is Dufour, Achmet and Djikki, trusted soldiers of France; also Suleiman, an outcast of ugly and treacherous appearance, who has offered to lead the Major to the Great Oasis, and the tents of Emir el Hamel el Kebir because he, Suleiman, having been cast out by the Emir in dubious circumstances, has an ax of his own to grind. The Major does not trust Suleiman very much.

Both Mary Vanbrugh and Maudie Atkinson are, like the Major, dressed in Bedouin costume; and while Mary apparently refuses to take the Major or the dangers of the desert seriously, Maudie is rather anxious to meet some real Sheikhs, quite certain that they will live up to her romantic conception of them.

The Major, however, knows better than this. He knows the true Sheikh for what he really is, and as he ponders the fate of the Zaguig garrison, outnumbered a thousand to one, and of Mary's brother Otis, who had courageously elected to remain behind, the Major prays for the sight of a friendly north-bound caravan, into the care of which he could place the two girls so that he could proceed upon his mission to the Emir el Hamel el Kebir in a much easier frame of mind.

With this slim hope to help him carry on, the Major continues his story.

CHAPTER IX (continued)

DAY followed lazy day and night followed active night, as weeks became a month and we steadily hurried southeast; but no caravan gladdened my eyes, nor sight of any human being away from the few oases, save only a lonely Targui scout, motionless on his mehara camel on a high sandhill at evening.

After seeing this disturbing sight, I made a forced march all through the night and far into the next day, and hoped that we had escaped unseen and unfollowed.

I was very troubled in mind during these days.

Not only was my anxiety as to the fate of the two girls constant, but I was annoyed to find that I thought

far more about Mary Vanbrugh than about the tremendously important work that lay before me.

My mind was more occupied by this slip of a girl than by my mission, upon which might depend the issues of Peace or War, the lives of thousands of men, the loss or gain of an Empire perhaps—certainly of millions of francs and years of the labor of soldiers and statesmen. . . .

Exit de Lannec!

I could not sleep at night for thinking of this girl, and for thinking of her fate; and again for thinking of how she was disturbing my mind which should have been concentrated on Duty.

And she was adding to my troubles by her behavior towards me personally.

At times she appeared positively to loathe me, and again at times she was so kind that I could scarcely forbear to take her in my arms; particularly when she called me "Nice Major Ivan" or showed her gratitude to me—though for what, God knows, for life was hard for her and for poor Maudie, the brave uncomplaining souls.

For the fact that her brother's fate must be a terrible blow to her I made allowance, and ascribed to it her changeful and capricious attitude toward me.

NEVER shall I forget one perfect night of full moon, by a glorious palm-shaded desert pool, one of those little oases that seem like Paradise and made the desert seem even more like Hell.

It was an evening that began badly, too. While fires were being lighted, camels fed, and tents pitched, the two girls went to bathe.

Strolling, I met Maudie returning, and she looked so fair and sweet, and my troubled soul was so full of gratitude to her for her courage and her

cheerfulness, that, as she stopped, and, with a delightful smile, said, "Excuse me, sir, but is that Mr. Du-four a *married* man?" I laughed and, and, putting a brotherly arm about her, kissed her warmly.

With remarkable speed and violence she smacked my face.

"Maudie," said I, aghast, "you misunderstood me entirely!"

"Well, you won't misunderstand me again, sir, anyhow!" replied Maudie, with a toss of her pretty head, and marched off, chin in air.

As she did so, a tinkling laugh from among the palms apprised me of the fact that Miss Vanbrugh had been an interested witness of this romantic little episode!

Nothing was said at dinner that evening, however, and after it, I sat apart with Mary Vanbrugh and had one of the most delightful hours of my life.

She began by speaking of her brother Otis, and the possibilities of his being yet alive, and then of her parents and of her other brother and sister. Papa was what she called "a bold bad beef-Baron," and I gathered that he owned millions of acres of land and hundreds of thousands of cattle in Western America.

A widower, and, I gathered, a man the warmth of whose temper was only exceeded by the warmth of his heart. The other girl, in giving birth to whom his beloved wife had died, was, strangely enough, the very apple of his eye, and she it was who kept house for him while Mary wandered.

The older brother had apparently been too like his father to agree with him.

"Dad surely was hard on Noel," she told me, "and Noel certainly riled Dad. . . . Would he go to school or college? Not he. He rode ranch with the cowboys and was just one of them. Slept down in their bunk-

house, too. Ran away from school as often as he was sent—and there Dad would find him, hidden by the cowboys, when he thought the boy was 'way East.

"Dad was all for education, having had none himself. Noel was all for avoiding it, having had some himself. . . .

"One merry morn he got so fresh with Dad that when he rode off Dad pulled himself together and lassoed him—just roped him like a steer—pulled him off his pony and laid into him with his quirt!

"Noel jumped up and pulled his gun. Then he threw it on the ground and just said, '*Goodby, Dad, I'm through,*' and that was the last we saw of Brother Noel. . . . How I did cry! . . . I worshiped Noel, although he was so much older than I. So did Dad—although Otis never gave him a minute's trouble and took to education like a duck. He's a Harvard graduate and Noel's a roughneck, if he's alive."

"And you never saw Noel again?" I asked. I wanted to keep her talking, to listen to that beautiful voice and watch that lovely face.

"Never. Nor heard from him. We heard of him, though, once—that after hoboing all over the States he was an enlisted man in a cavalry regiment, and then that a bronco-buster whom our overseer knew had seen him on a cattle-ship bound for Liverpool."

"And now you roam the wide world o'er, searching for the beloved playmate of your youth?" I remarked, perhaps fatuously.

"Rubbish!" was the reply. "I've almost forgotten what he looked like, and might not know him if I met him. I'd just love to see him again, though—dear old Noel. He never had an enemy and never did a mean thing. . . . And now tell me all about you, Major Ivan."

I talked about myself, as a man will do—to the right woman. And by and by I took her hand, and she did not withdraw it; rather clasped it as I said:

"Do you know, the devil's tempting me at this very moment to give the order to saddle up and ride north to safety."

"Feeling scared, Major?" she smiled—and, yes, she did return my pressure of her strong little hand.

"Yes—for you, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied. "I'm feeling horribly worried and frightened and anxious for you."

"Business down yonder urgent, Major," she asked.

"Alas, yes."

"And your chief is trusting you to put it through, neat and clean?"

"Yes."

"Then defy the devil and all his works, Major."

"If we could only meet a caravan."

"Nonsense! You don't play Joseph's Brethren with me, Major!"

"How can I take you into the power of a man who, for all I know, may be a devil incarnate?"

"I was going to say, 'Make a camp near the oasis and ride in alone,' but I shan't let you do that, Major."

"It is what I had thought of, but a man like this Emir would know all about us and our movements long before we were near his territory. And what happens to you, if I am made a prisoner or killed? Dufour would not go without me—nor would Achmet and Djikki for that matter."

"You're going to carry on just as if I were not here, my friend," she said, "and I'm coming right there with you—to share and share alike. I can always shoot myself when I'm bored with things. So can Maudie. She's got a little gun all right. I wouldn't be a drag on you, Major, for anything in the world."

And as she said those words,

and rubbed her shoulder nestlingly against mine, I took her other hand.

As I drew her toward me and was about to give her the first kiss of real love that I had ever given a woman in all my life, she snatched her hand away and, springing up, pointed in excitement toward the oasis.

"What is it?" I cried in some alarm, for my nerves were frayed with sleeplessness."

"I thought I saw a kind of winged-elephant cavorting above the trees. You know—like a flying-shrimp or whistling water-rat of the upper air, Major Ivan."

And as I raged, she laughed and sang that cursed air again, *with* words this time. And the words were:

There are heroes in plenty, and well-known
to fame,

In the ranks that are led by the Czar;
But among the most reckless of name or of
fame,

Was Ivan Petruski Skivah.

He could imitate Irving, play euchre, or pool;
And perform on the Spanish guitar—
In fact, quite the cream of the Muscovite
team

Was Ivan Petruski Skivah.

Confound the girl, she had been laughing at me the whole time!

I gave the order to saddle up, and did a double march on toward the south of the rising sun—when it did rise. . . .

That poor weak fool of a de Lannec!

CHAPTER X

THE TOUAREG AND "DEAR IVAN"

ONE OR TWO days later, as we jogged along in the "cool" of the evening, Dufour, the trusty rear-guard of my little caravan, rode up to me.

"We're followed, sir," said he. "Touareg, I think. I have sent Djikki back to scout."

"If they're Touareg they'll surround our next camp and rush us suddenly," I said. "Our night-traveling has upset them, as there has been no chance for the surprise-at-dawn that they're so fond of."

"They'll follow us all night and attack when they think we are busy making camp tomorrow morning," said Dufour.

"We'll try to shake them off by zig-zagging and circling," I replied. "If it weren't for the women, it would be amusing to ride right around behind them and attack. They may be only a small gang and not a *harka*."

Mary Vanbrugh closed up. I had been riding ahead in haughty displeasure, until Dufour came to me. I had done with Mary Vanbrugh.

"What is it, Major?" she asked.

"Nothing, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied.

"What men-folk usually wag their heads and their tongues about," she agreed.

Maudie's *bassourab*-adorned camel overtook us as we dropped into a walk and then halted.

"What is it, Mr. Dufour?" I heard her ask.

"*Sheikhs!*" replied Dufour maliciously, and I wondered if his face had also been slapped.

I looked at Maudie. Methought she beamed joyously.

Half an hour later Djikki of the wonderful eye-sight came riding up at top-speed.

"Veiled Touareg," he said. "The Forgotten of God. About five hands of fingers. Like the crescent moon," from which I knew that we were being followed by about five and twenty Touareg and that they were riding in a curved line, the horns of which would encircle us at the right time.

There was nothing for it but to ride on. We were five rifles—six

counting Mary Vanbrugh — and shooting from behind our camels, we should give a good account of ourselves against mounted men advancing over open country.

Nor would so small a gang resolutely push home an attack upon so straight-shooting and determined a band as ourselves.

But what if they managed to kill our camels?

"Ride after Suleiman as fast as you can, Miss Vanbrugh, with Maudie. Achmet will ride behind you," said I.

"You and I and Djikki will do rearguard, Dufour."

"Don't be alarmed if you hear firing," I added to the girls.

"Oh, Major, I shall jibber with fright, and look foolish in the face," drawled Mary Vanbrugh, and I was under the impression that Maudie's lips parted to breathe the word "*Sheikhs!*"

We rode in this order for an hour, and I then left Djikki on a sand-dune, with orders to watch while the light lasted. I thought he would get our pursuers silhouetted against the sunset and see if their numbers had increased, their formation or direction changed, and judge whether their pace had quickened or slackened.

"As soon as it is dark, we'll turn sharp-right, for a couple of hours, and then left again," I said to Dufour.

"Yes, sir," said he. "They won't be able to follow tracks in the dark. Not above a walking pace."

He had hardly spoken when a rifle cracked. . . . Again twice. . . . Aimed from us, by the sound . . . Djikki! . . . We wheeled round together and rode back along our tracks. We passed Djikki's *barraked* camel and saw the Sudanese lying behind the crest of a sandhill. He stood up and came down to us.

"Three," he said. "Swift scouts in

advance of the rest. I hit one man and one camel. The other fled. Four hundred metres."

For a Sudanese it was very fine marksmanship.

"It'll show them we're awake, anyhow," said Dufour; and we rode off quickly to overtake the others.

As soon as it was as dark as it ever is in the starlit desert, I took the lead, and turned sharply from our line as we were riding over a rocky, stony patch that would show no prints of the soft feet of camels.

For an hour or two I followed the line, and then turned sharply to the left, parallel with our original track.

Thereafter I dropped to the rear, leaving Dufour to lead. I preferred to rely upon his acquired scientific skill rather than upon Suleiman's desert sense of direction when I left the head of the caravan at night.

Dropping back, I halted until I could only just see the outline of the last rider, Achmet, sometimes as a blur of white in the star-shine, sometimes as a silhouette against the blue-black starry sky.

Vast, vast emptiness. Universes beyond universes. Rhythmic fall of soft feet on sand . . . Rhythmic swaying of the great camel's warm body . . . World swaying . . . Stars swaying . . .

I will not falsely accuse myself of having fallen asleep, for I do not believe I slept, though I have done such a thing on the back of a camel. But I was certainly slightly hypnotized by star-gazing and the perfect rhythm of my camel's tireless changeless trot. And I had been very short of sleep for weeks.

Perhaps I did sleep for a few seconds. . . .

Anyhow, I came quite gradually from a general inattentiveness toward the phenomena of reality, to an interest therein, and then to an

awareness that gripped my heart like the clutch of a cold hand.

First I noted dully that I had drawn level with Achmet and was some yards to his right. Then that Djikki, or Suleiman perhaps, was riding a few yards to my right. And then that someone else was close behind me.

I must have got right into the middle of the caravan. Curious! Why, what was this? I rubbed my eyes. None of us carried a lance or spear of any kind!

It was then that my blood ran cold, for I knew *I was riding with the Touareg!*

I pulled myself together and did some quick thinking. Did each of them take me for some other member of their band who had ridden to the front and been overtaken again, or were they clutching to themselves at the poor fool whom they had outwitted, and who was now in their power?

Was it their object to ride on with me, silently, until the Touareg band and the caravan were one body, and then each robber select his victim and slay him?

What should I do? My rifle was across my thighs. No, I could not have been asleep or I should have dropped it.

I slowly turned my head and looked behind me. I could see no others, but it was very dark and others might be near besides the three whom I could distinguish clearly.

Achmet was not in sight. What should I do?

Work, poor brain, work! Her life depends on it!

Could I draw ahead of them sufficiently fast to overtake the caravan, give a swift order, and have my men wheel about and ready to meet our pursuers with a sudden volley and then rapid fire?

I could try, anyhow. I raised the

long camel-stick that dangled from my wrist, and my camel quickened its pace instantly. There is never any need to strike a well-trained *mehara*.

But the ghostly riders to right and left of me kept their positions.

I had gained nothing.

I must not appear to be trying to escape. With faint pressure on the left nose-rein of my camel, I endeavored to edge imperceptibly toward the shadow on my left. I would speak to him as though I were a brother Targui, as soon as I was close enough to shoot with certainty, if he attacked me.

The result showed me that the raiders had not taken me for one of themselves: I could get no nearer to the man, nor draw farther from the rider on my right.

Wits against wits; and Mary Vanbrugh's life in the balance.

Gently I drew rein and slowed down very gradually. My silent nightmare companions did the same.

This would let the caravan draw ahead of us and give my men more time for action, when the time for action came.

Slower and slower grew my pace, and I dropped forward, nodding like a man asleep, my eyes straining beneath my *haik* to watch these devils who shepherded me along.

My camel dropped into a walk, and very gradually the two shadows converged upon me to do a silent job with sword or spear. And what of the man behind me? The muscles of my shoulder-blades writhed as I thought of the cold steel that even then might be within a yard of my back.

Suddenly I pulled up, raised my rifle, and fired carefully, with the speed that has no haste, at the rider on my right. I aimed where, if I missed his thigh, I should hit his camel, and hoped to hit both.

As my rifle roared in the deep silence of the night, I swung left for the easier shot, fired again and drove my camel bounding forward. I crouched low, as I worked the bolt of my rifle, in the hope of evading spear-thrust or sword-stroke from behind. As I did so, a rifle banged behind me at a few yards range, and I felt as though my left arm had been struck with a red-hot axe.

With the right hand that held the rifle, I wheeled my camel round in a flash, steadied the beast and myself, and, one-handed, fired from my hip at a camel that suddenly loomed up before me. Then I wheeled about again and sent my good beast forward at racing speed.

My left arm swung useless, and I could feel the blood pouring down over my hand in a stream. This would not do. I shoved my rifle under my thigh, and with my right hand raised my left and got the arm up so that I could hold it by the elbow, with the left hand beneath my chin.

I then fought off the feeling of faintness caused by shock and the loss of blood, and wondered if Suleiman, Djikki, Achmet and Dufour would shoot first and challenge afterward, as I rode into them.

Evidently I had brought down the three camels at which I had aimed; not a difficult thing to do, save in darkness and when firing from the back of a camel, whose very breathing sways one's rifle . . .

I was getting faint again. If I could only plug the holes and improvise a sling . . .

As the numbness of the arm wore off and I worried at it, I began to hope and believe that the bone was not broken.

Fancy a shattered elbow-joint, in the desert, and with the need to ride fast and constantly.

Then I was aware of three dark masses in line.

"Major! Shout!" cried a voice, and with great promptitude I shouted, and three rifles came down from the firing position.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"I made her ride on with Achmet, hell-for-leather," replied Dufour. "I swore she'd help us more that way, till we can see what's doing. What happened, sir?"

I told him.

"They'll trail us all right," said Dufour. "Those were scouts and there would be a line of connecting-links between them and the main body. Shall we wait, and get them one by one?"

"No," I replied. "They'd encircle us and they'd get the others while we waited here. It'll be daylight soon."

It was in the dim daylight of the false dawn that we sighted the baggage-camels of the caravan.

"Those baggage-camels will have to be left," said Dufour.

"You can't ride away from Touareg," I answered. "It's hopeless. We've got to fight, if they attack. They may not do so, having been badly stung already. But the Targui is a vengeful beast. It isn't as though they were ordinary Bedouin."

The light grew stronger, and we drew near to the others. I told Djikki to drop back and to fire directly he saw anything of the robbers, thus warning us, and standing them off while we made what preparations we could.

I suddenly felt extremely giddy, sick, and faint. My white burnous made a ghastly show. I was wet through, from my waist to my left foot, with blood. I must have lost a frightful lot.

THE next thing I knew was that I was lying with my head on Maudie's lap, while Mary Vanbrugh,

white of face but deft of hand, banded my arm and strapped it across my chest. She had evidently torn up some linen garment for this purpose. Mary's eyes were fixed on her work, and Maudie's on the horizon. The men were crouched each behind his kneeling camel.

"Dear Ivan," murmured Mary as she worked.

I shut my eyes again, quickly and without shame. It was heavenly to rest thus for a few minutes.

"Oh, is he *dead*, miss?" quavered poor Maudie.

"We shall all be dead in a few minutes, I expect, child," replied Mary. "Have you a safety-pin? Dead as cold mutton. *Sheikhs*, my dear! Shall I shoot you at the last, Maudie, or would you rather do it yourself?"

"Well—if you wouldn't mind, miss? Thank you very much, if it's not troubling you."

Silence.

"Dear Ivan," came a sweet whisper. "Oh, I *have* been a beast to him, Maudie. . . . Yes, I'll shoot you with pleasure, child. . . . How could I be such a wretch as to treat him like that. . . . He is the bravest, nicest, *dearest*. . . ."

I felt a cad, and opened my eyes, almost into those of Mary, whose lips were just—were they—were they?

"Yes, miss," said Maudie, her eyes and thoughts afar off. "He is a beautiful gentleman."

"Hello! the patient has woke up!" cried Mary, drawing back quickly. "Had a nice nap, Major? How do you feel? Here, have a look into the cup that cheers and inebriates," and she lifted a mug containing cognac and water to my lips.

I drank the lot and felt better.

"My heart come into my mouth, it did, sir, when I saw you fall head-first off that camel. You fair *splashed* blood, sir," said Maudie. "Clean into me mouth me heart come, sir."

"Hope you swallowed the little thing again, Maud. . . . That's the way, Major. Drinks it up like milk and looks round for more. Got a nice clean flesh wound and no bones touched, the clever man."

I sat up.

"Get these camels farther apart, Dufour!" I shouted. "Absolute focal point to draw concentrated fire, bunched like that!"

Nobody must think that I was down and out, and that the reins were slipping from a sick man's grasp.

The men were eating dates as they watched, and Mary had opened a tin of biscuits and one of sardines.

"Hark at the Major saying his piece," a voice murmured from beneath a flowing *kafiyeh* beside me. "Isn't he fierce this morning?"

I got to my feet and pulled myself together. . . . Splendid! . . . Either the brandy, or the thought of a kiss I foolishly imagined that I had nearly received, had gone to my head. I ate ravenously for the next ten minutes, and drank cold tea from a water-bottle.

"There's many a slip between the kiss and the lip," I murmured anon, in a voice to match the one that had last spoken.

I was unwise.

"Wrong again, Major Ivan Petruski *Skivah*! I was just goin' to blow a smut off your nose," was the prompt reply, and I seemed to hear thereafter a crooning of—

But among the most reckless of name and of fame

Was Ivan Petruski *Skivah*

: . . . and perform on the Spanish *guitar*
In fact, quite the cream of "Intelligence"
team

Was Ivan Petruski *Skivah*

I managed to get onto my camel, and soon began to feel a great deal

better, perhaps helped by my anger at myself for collapsing.

Still, blood is blood, and one misses a few gallons when they are gone.

"Ride on with Achmet again," I called to Miss Vanbrugh, and bade the rest mount. "We'll keep on now, just as long as we can," I said to Dufour, and ordered Djikki to keep as far behind us as was safe. In a matter of that sort, Djikki's judgment was as good as anybody's.

Dufour then told me a piece of news.

A few miles to the southeast of us was, according to Suleiman, a salt-lake or marsh that extended to the base of a chain of mountains. The strip of country between the two was very narrow.

We could camp there.

If the Touareg attacked us, they could only do so on a narrow front, and could not possibly surround us. To go north round the lake, or south round the mountains, would be several days' journey.

"That will be the place for us, sir," concluded Dufour.

"Yes," I agreed, "if the Touareg are not there before us."

CHAPTER XI

FLIGHT AND CAPTURE

THAT would have been one of the worst days of my life, and that is saying a good deal, had it not been for a certain exultation and joy that bubbled up in my heart as I thought of the look in Miss Vanbrugh's eyes when I had opened mine.

What made it so terrible was not merely the maddening ache in my arm that seemed to throb in unison with the movement of my camel, but the thought of what I must do if this pass was what I pictured it to be, and if the Touareg attacked us in strength.

It would be a very miserable and heart-breaking duty—to ride on and leave my men to hold that pass that I might escape and fulfill my mission.

It is useless to attempt to serve one's country in the Secret Service if one's private feelings, desires, likes and dislikes are to be allowed to come between one and one's country's good.

Poor de Lannec! How weak and unworthy he had been!

There was one grain of comfort; nothing would be gained by my staying and dying with my followers. It would profit them nothing at all. They would die just the same. If the Touareg could, by dint of numbers, overcome four, they could overcome five. I could not save them by staying with them.

But oh, the misery, the agony, of ordering them to hold that pass while I rode to safety!

How could I give the order, "Die, but do not retire—until I have had time to get well away?"

And the girls? Would they be a hindrance to me on two of the fleetest camels? And perhaps any of my little band who did not understand my desertion of them would think they were fighting to save the women, whom I was taking to safety—if I decided to take them.

But it would be ten times worse than leaving my comrades in Zaguig.

How could I leave Mary Vanbrugh, perhaps to fall, living, into the hands of those bestial devils?

THE place proved an ideal spot for a rear-guard action, and the Touareg were not before us.

Lofty and forbidding rocks rose high, sheer from the very edge of a malodorous swamp, from whose salt-caked edge grew dry bents that rattled in the wind.

Between the swamp and the stone cliffs was a tract of boulder-strewn

sand, averaging a hundred yards in width.

Here we camped, lit fires, and prepared to have a long and thorough rest, unless the Touareg attacked, until night.

Achmet quickly pitched the little *tents d'abri*, fixed the camp beds for the girls, and unrolled the "flea-bags" and thin mattresses, while his kettle boiled. It was a strangely peaceful and domestic scene in view of the fact that sudden death or slow torture loomed so large and near.

Dufour himself ungirthed and fed the camels, while Suleiman stood upon a rock and stared out into the desert. He could probably see twice as far as Dufour or I.

"Into that tent, Major," said the cool sweet voice that I was beginning to love. "I have made the bed as comfy as I can. Have Achmet pull your boots off. I'll come in ten minutes or so and dress your arm again."

"And what about you?" I replied. "I'm not going to take your tent. I am quite all right, thanks."

"Maudie and I are going to take turns on the other bed," she replied. "And you *are* going to take my tent, and lie down, too. What's going to happen to the show if you get ill? Suppose you get fever? Suppose your arm mortifies and falls into the soup? Let's get that wound fixed again before those low-brow Touareg shoot us up again. You'll find a cold-water compress very soothing. Go along, Major."

I thought of something more soothing than that, the touch of cool, deft fingers.

"I'd be shot daily if you were there to bind me up, Miss Vanbrugh," I said, as I gave in to her urgency and went to the tent.

"Well, perhaps they'll oblige after breakfast, Major, and plug your other arm," observed this most unsentimental young woman.

"But, my dear!" I expostulated, "if I had no arms at all, how could I——?"

"Just what I was thinking, Major," was the reply, as, to hide a smile, she stooped over the big suitcase and extracted the medicine-chest.

As we hastily swallowed our meal of dates, rice, biscuits and tinned milk, I gave my last orders to Dufour.

"You'll hold this pass while there is a man of you alive!" I said.

"*Oui, mon Commandant,*" replied the brave man, with the same quiet nonchalance that would have marked his acknowledgment of an order to have the camels saddled.

"Should the Touareg abandon the attack, which they will not do, any survivor is to ride due southeast until he reaches the Great Oasis."

"*Oui, mon Commandant.*"

"Even if Suleiman is killed there will be no difficulty in finding the place, but we'll hear what he has to say about wells and water-holes while he is still hale and hearty."

"*Oui, mon Commandant.*"

"But I fear there won't be any survivors—four against a *harka*—only a hundred to one. But you must hold them up until I am well away. They won't charge while your shooting is quick and accurate. When they *do*, they'll get you, of course, but don't ride for it at the last moment. See it through *here*, to give the impression that you are the whole party. . . . I must not be pursued. . . .

"*Oui, mon Commandant.*"

"Excuse me, Major de Beaujolais," cut in the voice of Miss Vanbrugh, icily cold and most incisive, "is it possible that you are talking about deserting your men? Leaving them to die here while *you* escape? Ordering them to remain here to increase your own chance of safety, in fact?"

"I was giving instructions to my subordinate, who will remain here

with the others, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied coldly. "Would you be good enough to refrain from interrupting?"

My uncle's words burned before my eyes:

"A woman, of course. . . . He turned aside from his duty. . . . Exit de Lannec. . . ."

Miss Vanbrugh put her hand on Dufour's arm.

"If you'll be so kind as to enroll me, Mr. Dufour, I am a very good rifle-shot," she said. "I shall dislike perishing with you intensely, but I should dislike deserting you infinitely more." And she smiled very sweetly on my brave Dufour.

He kissed her hand respectfully and looked inquiringly at me.

"And Maudie?" I asked Miss Vanbrugh. "Is she to be a romantic heroine, too? I hope she can throw stones better than most girls, for I understand she has never fired a rifle or pistol in her life."

"I think you really are the most insufferable and detestable creature I have ever met," replied Miss Vanbrugh.

"Interesting, but hardly germane to the discussion," I replied. "Listen, Miss Vanbrugh," I continued. "If the Touareg are upon us, as I have no doubt they are, I am going to ride straight for the Great Oasis. Dufour, Achmet, Djikki and Suleiman will stand the Touareg off, as long as possible. Eventually my men will be rushed and slaughtered. If sufficiently alive, when overcome and seized, they will be tortured unbelievably."

"The Touareg may, or may not, then follow me, but they will have no chance of overtaking me as I shall have a long start, I shall have the best of the riding-camels, and I shall make forced marches. Now, I see no reason why you and Maudie should not accompany me for as long as you can stand the pace?"

"Oh, Major, we might conceivably hinder you and so imperil your most precious life, endanger your safety, so essential to France and the world in general——"

"I'll take good care you don't do that, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied. "But, as I say, there is no reason why you and your maid should not ride off with me—though, I give you fair warning, I shall probably ride for twenty-four hours without stopping. But you will be most welcome on these conditions. In fact, I pray you to do so. Trust me to see to it that you are no hindrance nor source of danger to the success of my mission."

"Oh, I trust you for that, Major de Beaujolais," she replied bitterly.

"Then be ready to start as soon as we get word from Djikki that they are coming," I said. "Once again—there is no reason why you should not come with me."

"Thank you," simply. "But there is a very strong reason. I would sooner die twice over. I remain here. I can think of only one thing worse than falling alive into the hands of these beasts, and that is deserting my friends, Mr. Dufour, Achmet and Djikki. Why, I wouldn't desert even that evil-looking Suleiman after he had served me faithfully. I wouldn't desert a dog. . . ."

"And Maudie?" I asked.

"She shall do exactly as she pleases," answered the girl.

Turning to Maudie, who was listening open-mouthed, she said: "Will you ride off with Major de Beaujolais, my child, or will you stay with me? You may get to safety with this gallant gentleman—if you can keep him in sight. It is death to stay here, apparently, but I will take care that it is death and not torture for you, my dear."

"Wouldn't the Sheikhs treat us well, miss?" asked Maudie.

"Oh, *Sheikhs!*" snapped Miss Van-

brugh. "These are two-legged beasts, my good idiot. They are human wolves, torturing devils, merciless brutes. . . . What is the worst thing you've got in your country?"

"Burglars, miss," replied Maudie promptly.

"Well, the ugliest cutthroat burglar that ever hid under your bed or came in at your window in the middle of the night is just a dear little woolly lambkin—compared with the best of these murderous savages."

Maudie's face fell.

"I thought perhaps these was Sheikhs, miss, like in the book. But, anyhow, I was going to do what you do, miss, and go where you go—of course, please, miss."

"I am afraid you are another of these ordinary queer creatures that think faithfulness and loyalty come first, dear," said Miss Vanbrugh, and gave Maudie's hand a squeeze. "But you'll do what I tell you, Maudie, won't you?"

"That's what I'm here for, please, miss, thank you," replied the girl.

"Well, you're going with Major de Beaujolais," said Miss Vanbrugh. "I hate sending you off with a gentleman of his advanced views and superior standards, but I should hate shooting you even more."

"Yes, miss, thank you," answered Maudie, and I rose and strolled to my tent.

Ours is not an easy service. Duty is a *very* jealous god.

MISS VANBRUGH came and dressed my arm and we spoke no word to each other during the process. How she hated me!

A few minutes later, Suleiman uttered a shout. He could see a rider on the horizon. I hurried toward him.

"It is Djikki, the black slave," he said.

"Djikki, the French Soudanese soldier, you dog," I growled at him, and

at any other time would have fittingly rewarded the ugly scowl with which he replied:

"They are coming," shouted Djikki, as his swift camel drew near, and we all rushed to work like fiends at packing-up and making preparations for fight and flight respectively.

"They are more than ten hands of five fingers now," said Djikki as he dismounted. "More than a battalion of soldiers in number. They are riding along our track. Here in an hour."

"Miss Vanbrugh," said I, "I have got to go. If you stay here I shall go on and do my work. When that is completed, I shall come back to this spot and shoot myself. Think of Maudie, too, if you won't of yourself or me. Do you want the girl to meet some of her 'desert sheikhs' at last?"

"Can you leave Dufour and the brown brothers, Major de Beaujolais? I love that little Djikki-bird."

"I can, Miss Vanbrugh, because I must. And if I, a soldier, can do such a thing, a girl can. What could you do by stopping to die here?"

"Shoot," she replied, "as fast and as straight as any of them."

"My dear lady," I said, "if four rifles won't keep off a hundred, five won't. If five can, four can. And I must slink off."

"Your say goes, Major. I suppose you are right," answered the girl, and my heart leaped up again. "But I hate myself, and I loathe you."

All worked like slaves to get the four swiftest camels saddled and loaded with light and indispensable things. The fourth one, although a *mehara*, had to carry one tent *d'abri* and bed, water, and food.

I could hardly trust myself to speak as I wrung Dufour's hand, nor when I patted the shoulder of my splendid Achmet. Djikki put my hand to his forehead and his heart, and then knelt to kiss my feet.

The drop of comfort in the bitter suffering of that moment was my knowledge that these splendid colleagues of mine, white man, brown man, and black, knew that what I was doing was my *duty* and that what they were about to do was theirs.

I bade Suleiman fight for his life; he was too new a recruit to the Service to be expected to fight for an ideal.

Miss Vanbrugh and Maudie mounted their *mehari*—Maudie still as cheerful and plucky as ever and, I am certain, thrilled, and still hopeful of tender adventure.

I should be surprised if her novel-ette-turned brain and rubbish-fed imagination did not even yet picture the villainous desert wolves, who were so close on our trail, as the brave band of a "lovely" desert sheikh in hot pursuit of one Maudie Atkinson, of whose beauty and desirability he had somehow heard.

There was a shout from Suleiman again. Something moving on the horizon.

I gave the word to start and took a last look round.

My men's camels were *barracked* out of danger. Each man had a hundred rounds of ammunition, a *girba* of water, a little heap of dates, and an impregnable position behind a convenient rock.

Four against scores, perhaps hundreds. But in a narrow pass. If only the Touareg would content themselves with shooting and lacked the courage to charge.

"Say, Major," called Mary, "let those desert dead-beats hear six rifles for a bit! They may remember an urgent date back in their home town, thinking we're a regular sheriff's posse of *vigilantes* or a big bold band of bad men."

Dare I? It would take a tiny trifle

of the load of misery from my shoulders.

We brought our camels to their knees again and rejoined the garrison of the pass, the men of this little African Thermopylae.

Miss Vanbrugh chose her rock, rested her rifle on it, sighted, raised the slide of her back-sight a little, all in a most business-like manner.

Maudie crouched at my feet, behind a rock, and I showed her how to work the bolt of my rifle after each shot. I was one-handed, and Maudie had, of course, never handled a rifle in her life.

I waited until we could distinguish human and animal forms in the approaching cloud of dust, and then gave the range at 2,000 metres.

"*Fixe!*" I cried coolly thereafter, for the benefit of my native soldiers. "*Feux de salve. En Joue! . . . Feu!*"

It was an admirable volley, even Suleiman firing exactly on the word, although he knew no word of French.

Three times I repeated the volley, and then gave the order for a rapid *feu de joie*, as it were, at 1,500 metres, so that the advancing Touareg should hear at least six rifles, and suppose that there were probably many more. I then ordered my men, in succession, to fire two shots as quickly as possible, each firing as soon as the man on his left had got his two shots off. This should create doubt and anxiety as to our numbers.

I then ordered rapid independent fire.

The Touareg had deployed wildly, dismounted, and opened fire. This rejoiced me, for I had conceived the quite unlikely possibility of their charging in one headlong overwhelming wave.

It was time to go.

"Run to your camel, Maudie. Come on, Miss Vanbrugh," I shouted; and called to Dufour: "God watch over you, my dear friend."

CHAPTER XII

I had to go to the American girl and drag her from the rock behind which she stood, firing steadily and methodically, changing her sights occasionally, a handful of empty cartridge-cases on the ground to her right, a handful of cartridges ready to her hand on the rock.

I shall never forget that picture of Mary Vanbrugh, dressed as an Arab girl and fighting like a trained soldier.

"I'm not coming," she said.

I shook her as hard as I could and then dragged her to her camel.

WE rode for the rest of that day, and I thanked God when I could no longer hear the sounds of rifle-fire, glad though I was that they had only died away as distance weakened them, and not with the suddenness that would have meant a charge, massacre and pursuit.

I was a bitter, miserable and savage man when, at last, I was compelled to draw rein; and Miss Vanbrugh bore my evil temper with a gentle womanly sweetness of which I had not thought her capable. She dressed my arm again (and I almost hoped that it might never heal while she was near), and absolutely insisted that she and Maudie should share watches with me. When I refused this, she said:

"Very well, then, instead of one watching while two sleep, we'll both watch and Maudie shall chaperone us—and that's the sort of thing Euclid calls *reductio ad absurdum*, or plumb silly."

And nothing would shake her, although I could have done so willingly. What with the wound in my arm and the wound in my soul, I was near the end of my tether.

We took a two-hour watch in turn, poor Maudie nursing a rifle of which she was mortally afraid.

I thought long of poor de Lannec.

WE rode fast all the next day, and the two girls, thanks to the hard training of the previous weeks, stood the strain well.

It was for the sake of the camels, and not for that of the two brave women, that I at length drew rein and halted for a four-hour rest at a water-hole.

As I strode up and down, in misery and grief at the thoughts that filled my mind—thoughts of those splendid men whom I had left to die—Mary Vanbrugh came from the little *tent d'abri* which I had insisted that she and Maudie should use.

"Go and lie down," she said. "You'll get fever and make that arm worse. You must rest *sometimes*, if you are to carry on at all."

"I can't," said I. "They were like brothers to me. I loved each one of them."

"Talk, then, if you can't rest," replied this wise woman. "Tell me about them."

"Go and lie down yourself," I said.

"It's Maudie's turn for the bed," she answered. "Tell me about them. Sit down here."

So I told her about Dufour and his faithful service of nearly twenty years, of how he had offered his life for mine, and had saved it, more than once.

"And Djikki?" she asked.

"He, too," I replied. "He is a Senegalese soldier, and I took him for my orderly because of his great strength and endurance, his courage, fidelity and patience. He was with me when I was doing some risky work down Dahomey way. There was a certain king who was giving trouble and threatening worse trouble, and it was believed that he was actually getting Krupp guns from German trading-posts on the coast.

"We were ambushed in that unspeakable jungle, and only Djikki and I survived the fight. We were driven along for days, thrashed with sticks, prodded with spears, tied to trees at night, and bound so tightly that our limbs swelled and turned blue. We were given entrails to eat and carefully defiled water to drink.

"And one morning, as they untied us, that we might stagger on—towards the king's capital—Djikki snatched a *machete* from a man's hand, and, in spite of what we had been through, he fought like a fiend incarnate. It was Homeric. It was like a gorilla fighting baboons, a tiger fighting dogs. And when it was done, Djikki, dripping blood, a mass of gashes and gaping wounds, ran with me in his arms, on and on . . . a man quite mad with just one idea in his head . . . to save *me*!

"And when he could run no longer, he laid me down and cut the hide thongs that bound my wrists and elbows behind me, and those that cut into the flesh of my knees and ankles. Then he fainted from loss of blood.

"I collapsed next day with fever and dysentery and blood-poisoning, and Djikki—that black ex-cannibal—carried me in his arms like a mother her baby, day after day, for five weeks, and got food for the two of us as well.

"During that time I tasted the raw, warm blood of monkeys and the raw, cold flesh of lizards. And when, at last, we were found, by pure good luck, near a French post on the river, he had not, as I discovered later, eaten for three days (although I had) and he had not slept for four nights. But he had not left me and saved himself, as he could so easily have done.

"Instead of doing thirty miles a day and eating all he got, he did ten

miles a day with me in his arms, and gave me the food, pretending he had eaten. The doctor at the fort said he had never seen anyone so starved and emaciated, and yet able to keep his feet. . . . No, he never left me."

"And *you* have left *him*," said Miss Vanbrugh.

"I have left him," I replied.

"And Achmet?" she asked.

"The most faithful servant a man ever had," I said. "He has nursed me through fever—all sorts of illnesses—as gently and tirelessly as any woman could have done. He is a Spahi and a brave soldier. Once, I was getting my squadron across a deep crocodile-infested river, swollen and swift, very difficult and dangerous work if you have not had plenty of practise in handling a swimming horse.

"I crossed first, and then returned. Finally I came over last, and a huge crocodile took my horse—the noise and splashing of the crossing squadron having subsided—and I went down with the pair of them, heavily weighted, too.

"It was my Achmet who spurred his horse back into the water, swam to the spot and dived for me, regardless of crocodiles and the swift current. We were both pretty well dead by the time they dragged us out."

There was a pause.

"I have left *him*, too," I added.

Mary Vanbrugh was silent for a while.

"Major de Beaujolais," she said at length, "suppose there had been only one camel, when you—er—departed from the pass. Suppose the Touareg had contrived to shoot the rest. Would you have taken that camel and gone off alone?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Leaving Maudie and—and *me*?"

"Unhesitatingly," I replied.

She regarded me long and thought-

fully, and then, without speaking, returned to the tent where Maudie slept (and dreamed, doubtless, of Sheikhs.)

. . . Of course I would have left them! Was I to be another de Lannec and turn aside from the service of my country, imperil the interests and welfare of my Motherland, be false to the traditions of my great and noble Service, stultify the arduous and painful training of a lifetime, fail the trust reposed in me, and betray my General—for a woman?

But, oh, the thought of that woman struggling and shrieking in the vile hands of those inhuman, lustful devils!

And, oh, my splendid brave Dufour—simple, unswerving, inflexible devotee of Duty—who loved me. Oh, my great-hearted, faithful Djikki, who had done for me what few white men could or would have done; Djikki—who loved me. . . .

Oh, my beloved Achmet—strong, gentle soul—soldier, nurse, servant, and friend . . . who loved me.

Of course I would have taken the last camel, and with only one rider, too, to give it every chance of reaching the Great Oasis by forced marches. And of course I would leave those three to die alone, tomorrow, if they survived today.

Hard?

Indeed, ours is a hard Service; a Service for hard men, but a noble Service, and—Duty is indeed a jealous god.

AND on the third day, as we topped a long hill, we saw a sight that made me rub my eyes and say:

"This is fever and madness!"

For, a few hundred yards from us, rode a Camel Corps; a drilled and disciplined unit that, even as we crossed their skyline, deployed from

column to line at a signal from their leader, as though they had been Spahis; *barracked* their camels in perfect line and with perfect intervals, and sank from sight behind them, with leveled rifles.

Surely none but European officers or drill-sergeants had wrought that wonder?

I raised my hands above my head and rode toward their leader, as it was equally absurd to think of flight or of fight.

Caught! Trapped!

The commander was a misshapen dwarf with huge hunched shoulders and a big head.

"*Aselamu, Aleikum,*" I called pleasantly and coolly. "Greeting to you."

"*Salamn aleikum wa Rahmat Allah,*" growled the Bedouin gutturally, and staring fiercely from me to the *burkah*-covered women. "Greeting to you, and the peace of Allah."

"*Keif halak?*" I went on. "How do you do?" And wondered if this were the end.

Would Mary shoot herself in time? Did my mission end untimely here?

No. Discipline like this did not go hand in hand with foul savagery. There was a hope. . . .

"*Taiyib,*" replied the dwarf. "Well"—and proceeded to ask if we were alone.

"Quite," I assured him, swiftly rejecting the idea of saying there was an army of my friends close behind, and asked in turn, with flowery compliments upon the drill and discipline of his squadron, who he was.

"Commander of a hundred in the army of my Lord the Emir el Hamel el Kebir, Leader of the Faithful, and Shadow of the Prophet of God," was the sonorous reply.

Thus unexpectedly did I complete the first step in my worthy uncle's plans.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EMIR AND HIS VIZIER

IN a few hours we reached the Great Oasis, an astounding forest of palm-trees, roughly square in shape, with a ten-mile side.

My first glimpse of the Bedouin inhabitants of this area showed me that there was a people as different in spirit from those of Zaguig as it was possible to be.

There was nothing here of the furtively evil, lowering, suspicious fanaticism that makes "holy" places so utterly damnable.

Practically no notice was taken of our passage through the tent-villages and the more permanent little *qsars* of sandbrick and baked mud. The clean orderliness, prevalent everywhere, made me rub my eyes and stare again.

At the "capital" we were, after long and anxious waiting, handed over to a person of some importance, a *hadji* by his green turban, and, after a brief explanation of us by our captor—addressed as Marbruk ben Hassan by the *hadji*—we were conducted to the guest-tent.

To my enormous relief, the girls were to be beneath the same roof as myself, and to occupy the *anderum* or *hareem* part of the tent, which was divided from the rest by a heavy partition of felt. Presumably it was supposed that they were my wives.

This guest-tent stood apart from the big village and near to a group of the largest and finest tents I ever saw in use by Arabs. They were not of the low black Bedouin type, spreading and squat, but rather of the pavilion type, such as the great Kaid of Morocco use, or the Sultan himself.

Not very far away was a neat row of the usual kind of tent, which was evidently the "lines" of the soldiers of the body-guard.

Flags, flying from spears stuck in

the ground, showed that the pavilions were those of the Emir; and a Sudanese soldier who came on sentry-go near the guest-tent informed us tacitly that we were his prisoners.

The *hadji* (a man whom we were to know later as the Hadji Abdul Salam, a *marabout* or *mullah*, and a *hakim* or doctor) returned from announcing our arrival to the Emir.

"Our Lord the Emir el Hamel el Kebir offers you the three-days' hospitality, due by Korantic Law—and by the generosity of his heart—to all travelers. He will see you when you have rested. All that he has is yours."

"Including the edge of his sword," I said to myself.

But this was really excellent. And not long afterward, two black slave-women bore pots of steaming water to the *anderun*, and a boy brought me my share, less picturesquely, in kerosene-oil tins.

"May I come in, Major?" called Miss Vanbrugh. "I've knocked at the felt door . . . More felt than heard . . . I want to dress your arm."

I told her that I was feeling happier about her than I had been since we started, for I was beginning to hope and to believe that we were in the hands of an enlightened and merciful despot, instead of those of the truculent and destructive savage I had expected to find.

"How do you like this hotel?" I inquired as she pinned the bandage.

"Nothing like it in N'York," she replied. "Maudie's sitting on cushions and feeling she's half a Sheikness already."

"I'm going to put on my uniform." I announced. "Will you and she help a one-armed cripple?"

They did. And when the Hadji Abdul Salam, and a decent old gentleman, named Dawad Fetata, came with one or two more *ekhwans* to conduct me to the presence of the Emir, I was a French field-officer again, bathed,

shaven, and not looking wholly unworthy of the part I had to play.

SEATED on dyed camel-hair rugs piled on a carpet were the Emir el Hamel el Kebir and his Vizier, the Sheikh el Habibka—stately men in fine raiment.

I saw at a glance that the Emir, if he pretended to be the expected "Messiah" (Sidi Sayed el Mahdi el Senussi), was an impostor.

For he was most unmistakably of Touareg stock, with the gray eyes of Vandal origin, which are fairly common among the Touareg, many of whom are blue-eyed and ruddy-haired.

I liked his face immediately. This black-bearded, black-browed, hawk-faced Arab was a man of character, force and power. But I wished I could see the mouth hidden beneath the mass of mustache and beard. Dignified, calm, courteous, strong, this was no ruffianly and swash-buckling fanatic.

My hopes rose high.

The Vizier, whose favor might be most important, I took to be of Touareg or Berber-Bedouin stock, he too being somewhat fair for a desert-Arab. He was obviously a distaff blood-relation of the Emir.

These two men removed the mouth-pieces of their long-stemmed *nargilehs* from their lips and stared and stared and stared at me, in petrified astonishment—to which they were too stoical or too well-bred to give other expression.

I suppose the last person they expected to see was a French officer in uniform, and they sat in stupefied silence.

Had not the idea been too absurd, I could almost have thought that I saw a look of fear in their eyes. Perhaps they thought, for a moment, that I was the herald of a French

army that was even then getting into position round the oasis!

Fear is the father of cruelty, so I hoped that my fleeting impression was a false one. I would have disabused their minds by plunging straight in *medias res*, and announcing my business forthwith, but that this is not the way to handle Arabs.

Only by devious paths can the goal be reached, and much meaningless *faddhling* (gossip) must precede the real matter on which the mind is fixed.

I greeted the Emir with the correct honorifics and in the Arabic of the educated.

He replied in an accent with which I was not familiar—that of the classical Arabic of the *Hejaz*, I supposed.

Having exchanged compliments and inquired after each other's health, I told the Emir of the attack upon us by the Touareg at the Salt Lakes, and of my fears as to the fate of my followers.

"The Sons of Shaitan and the Forgotten of God! May they burn in Eblis eternally! Do they dare come within three days of me!" growled the Emir, and clapped his hands.

A black youth came running.

"Send me Marbruk ben Hassan, the Commander of a Hundred," said the Emir, and when the deformed but powerful cripple came, and humbly saluted his Lord, the latter gave a prompt order. "A hundred men. Ten days' rations. Ride to the Pass of the Salt Lake. A band of the Forgotten of God were there three days ago. Start within the hour . . ." He then whispered with him apart for a moment, and the man was gone.

The Vizier had not ceased to stare unwaveringly at me, but he uttered no word.

The Emir and I maintained a desultory and pointless conversation which concluded with an invitation to feast with him that night.

"I hear that you are accompanied

by two Nazrani ladies. I am informed that wives of Roumis eat with their Lords and in the presence of other men. I shall be honored if the Sitts—your wives doubtless?—will grace my poor tent . . . ”

One thing I liked about the Emir was the gentlemanly way in which he had foreborne to question me on the subject of the astounding presence of two white women. I accordingly told him the plain truth at once, thinking it wisest and safest.

“You will receive no such treatment here as they of Zaguig meted unto you,” said the Emir when I had finished my story. “They who come in peace may remain in peace. They who come in war remain in peace also—the peace of Death.” His voice was steely, if not menacing. “Do you come in peace or in war, Roumi?” he then asked. And as I replied, “On my head and my life, I come in peace, bearing a great and peaceful message,” I fancied that both he and the Vizier looked relieved—and I again wondered if they imagined the presence or approach of a French army.

WHATEVER I may forget, I shall remember that night’s *diffa* of *cous-cous*, a lamb stuffed with almonds and raisins, and roasted whole; *bamia*, a favorite vegetable of the Arabs; stewed chicken; a *pillau* of rice, nuts, raisins and chopped meat; *kaibabs* of kid; camel-milk curds; a paste-like macaroni cooked in butter, and heavy short-bread, fried in oil and eaten with sugar. Between the courses, we drank bowls of lemon-juice to aid our appetites; and they needed aid as the hours wore on.

When we were full to bursting, distended, comatose, came the ceremonial drinking of mint tea. After that, coffee. Finally we were offered very large cakes of extremely hard plain sugar.

Only five were present, the Emir,

the Vizier, Mary, Maudie and myself. We sat cross-legged on a carpet round a red cotton cloth upon which was a vast brass tray, laden with blue bowls filled to overflowing, and we ate with our fingers.

As I entered with Miss Vanbrugh and Maudie, and they dropped their *barracans*, thus exposing the two Paris frocks which the latter had put in the portmanteau at Zaguig, the effect upon the two Arabs was electrical. They were as men dreaming dreams and seeing visions.

I thought the Emir was going to collapse as he looked at Mary, and I watched the Vizier devouring her with hungry eyes. I grew a little nervous.

“The Lady Sitt Miriyam Hankinson el Vanbrugh,” said I, to make an imposing and sonorous mouthful of title, “and the Sitt Moad el Atkinson.”

I suppose they were the first white women the Arabs had seen, and they were struck dumb and senseless by their beauty.

Nor was the effect of their hosts much less upon the girls. Miss Vanbrugh stared, fascinated, at the gorgeous figure of the Emir, while poor Maudie did not know whether she was on her head or her heels.

“*Sheikhs!*” she murmured. “*Real Sheikhs!* . . . Oh, Sir, *isn’t* the big one a lovely man!”

The Emir, dragging his eyes from Mary, smiled graciously at the other fair woman, and murmured to me in his classic Arab: “Sweet as the dates of Besuima is her presence.” Which I duly translated. And then Mary found her voice.

“Well! Well! Major,” she observed. “Aren’t they sure-enough genuine parlor Sheikhs of song and story!” and before I could stop her, she offered her hand to the Emir, her eyes dancing with delight.

Probably neither the Emir nor the Vizier had ever shaken hands before,

but Mary's smile and gesture were self-explanatory, and both the Arabs made a good showing at this new ceremonial of the strange Roumis and their somewhat brazen, unveiled females.

Indeed, the Vizier seemed to know more about holding Mary's hand than releasing it, and again I grew nervous.

When the Emir said to me, "Let the other lady, the Sitt Moadi lay her hand upon my hands also," and I translated, I thought Maudie would have swooned with pleasure and confusion. Not only did the Emir shake hands—he stroked hands; and I grew less and less happy.

An amorous Arab is something amorous indeed. With these desert despots, to desire is to take, and if I were an obstacle it would be very easy to remove me. And what of the girls then? As the meal progressed and the sense of strangeness and shyness wore off, I was glad that the Sheikh and his Vizier could not possibly know a word of English (for Miss Vanbrugh's criticisms were pungent, and Maudie's admiration fulsome).

I was kept busy translating the Emir's remarks to the girls, and mis-translating the girls' remarks concerning the appearance, manners, and probable customs of their hosts.

At times I was in a cold perspiration of fear, as I thought of how utterly these two women were in the power of these men; and again at times, watching their faces, I saw no evil in them. Hard they were, perhaps relentless and ruthless, but not cruel, sensual nor debauched.

"Major," Miss Vanbrugh suddenly remarked, "d'you think these parlor Sheikhs would like to hear a little song? Tell them it's grace after meat." And before I could offer my views on the propriety of thus entertaining our hosts, or translating her remark, I once more heard the familiar air, but this time to the words:

The Sons of the Prophet are hardy and bold,
And quite unaccustomed to fear;
But of all—the most reckless of life and of limb,

Was Abdul the Bulbul Emir!

When they wanted a man to encourage the van,

Or to shout "*Attaboy!*" in the rear,

Or to storm a redoubt,

They always sent out

For Abdul the Bulbul Emir!

For Abdul the Bulbul Emir!

The Arabs stared, almost open-mouthed, and I explained that after-dinner singing was a custom with the Roumis, and that the song, out of compliment to our hosts, described the greatness, wisdom, virtue and courage of another famous Emir.

When we were at last permitted to cease from eating, and white-clad servants removed the remains of the *diffa*, the Emir bade me request Mary to talk of her country and her home, that I might translate her words to him.

He then asked many questions, through me.

Thereafter he directed that Maudie should talk.

But having almost realized the ambition of her life, Maudie was shy, and could only stammer incoherently while gazing bright-eyed, flushed, with parted lips and quickened breathing, at the huge, handsome, and gorgeously attired Emir.

The Vizier, the Sheikh el Habibka, scarcely uttered a word the whole evening, but he hardly took his eyes from Miss Vanbrugh's face.

In the bad moments to which I have alluded, I felt that if the worst came to the worst, Maudie would be imprisoned in the Emir's *hareem*, and Mary in that of the Sheikh el Habibka—unless the Emir took them both.

The sooner I could dangle before their eyes the million francs and the enormous advantages of an *entente* and an alliance with France, the better it would be; and the less they saw of the girls the better it would be also.

"Well, Major, it's time you went to bed," said Mary. "Remember, you're a sick man!"

"We can't move till the Emir gives the hint," I replied.

"Well, I wish he'd do it, the great old coot. Tell him what I'm saying, Major—that he fancies he's some punkins, but he's not the perfect little gentleman he thinks he is, or he'd see I'm tired to death." And she yawned heavily.

Luckily the Emir shortly afterward suggested that we might be weary, and though I told him that no one could be weary in his presence, he hinted that *he* was so in mine.

The leave-taking made it clear that Maudie's hand delighted the Emir, while that of Mary was precious in the sight of the Sheikh el Habibka. There was a look of determination in that man's eye.

As we entered the guest-tent, I said to Miss Vanbrugh, "Scream, if there's any trouble in the night."

"Scream! I shall *shoot*. Let the 'trouble' do the screaming. Good-night, Major," was the young lady's reply.

CHAPTER XIV

SPLENDID DE LANNEC!

THE next day I had an interview with the Emir, in the presence, as always, of the Vizier, and, after infinite meanderings around all subjects but the real one, we came to it at last.

I made it clear that what I offered him was the friendship of a most powerful protector, great wealth, and all the advantages that would ensue if a caravan-road were made and guarded from the Great Oasis to Zaguig, and trade-relations opened up between his people and the North.

I glanced at the possibility of our supplying him with arms including

machine-guns and, possibly, light artillery, later on.

I grew eloquent in showing him how the friendship of France could raise him to a safe independence, and how in the rôle of protégé of France he could benefit his people and give them the blessings of civilization.

The Emir repeated my phrase, but with a peculiar intonation.

"The blessings of civilization!" he mused. "Drink . . . Disease . . . Unrest . . . Machine-guns . . . Has the civilization of the Roumis always proved such a blessing to the darker races who have come in contact with it?"

The two stroked their beards, and eyed me long and thoughtfully.

I assured the Emir that it would be in his power to pick and choose. Isolated as his people were, there need be no "contact." All that France wanted was his friendship. Provided he were loyal and kept the terms of the treaty exactly, he could use the subsidy as he pleased, and could discriminate between the curses and the real blessings of western civilization.

Surely he could see to it that only good ensued? Nothing was further from the thoughts of the French Government than interference—much less conquest, or even "peaceful penetration." All we asked was that the Confederation which he ruled should be a source of strength and not of weakness to us; that the Great Oasis should be an outpost of France in the hands of the Emir el Hamel el Kebir. And I hinted at his own danger from others who would not come to him thus, with offers of gold and protection, but with armies.

"We will talk of these matters again," said the Emir at length. "*Khallas!* It is finished."

THAT evening, a riding-party was arranged, and, mounted on beautiful horses, the Sheikh el Habibka and

Miss Vanbrugh rode together; the Emir, on a white camel, rode with Maudie—who, very wisely would not get on a horse, and I rode with a party of fine courteous Arabs who were minor Sheikhs, officers of the soldiery, councilors, friends and hangers-on of the Emir and the Vizier.

We rode through the oasis out into the desert.

I did not enjoy my ride, for, before very long, I lost sight of the two girls, and could only hope for the best while fearing the worst. Women are so attracted by externals and so easily deceived by a courteous and gallant manner.

One comfort was that neither girl could speak a word of Arabic, so there was nothing to fear from plausible tongues.

Any love-making would have to be done in dumb-show, and I was beginning to feel there was no likelihood of *force majeure*—both men giving me the impression of innate gentlemanliness and decency.

Still Arabs are Arabs and this was the Sahara; and as I noted that the Emir returned with Miss Vanbrugh and the Vizier with Maud, I wanted nothing so much as to get safely away with my women-folk and a signed treaty of alliance.

BUT this was just what I could not do. Time after time, I sought audience with the Emir, only to find that he was engaged or sleeping or busy or absent from the Oasis.

Time after time, when his guest at meat, riding or *faddhling* with him on the rug-strewn carpet before the pavilions, I tried to get him to discuss the objects of my visit, but in vain.

Always it was: "We will talk of it tomorrow, *Inshallah*."

His eternal "*Bokra! Bokra!*" was as bad as the *mânana* of the Spaniards. And "tomorrow" never came.

The return of Marbruk ben Hassan and his camel-squadron brought me news that depressed me to the depths, and darkened my life for days.

Evidently my heroes had fought to their last cartridge and had then been overwhelmed. Beneath a great cairn of stones, Marbruk and his men had buried what remained of Dufour, Achmet and Djikki.

It was plain to me that Suleiman had deserted, for only three mangled corpses were found and the track of a single camel fleeing southwestward from the spot.

That he had not fought to the last, and then escaped or been captured alive by the Touareg, was shown by the fact that, where he had lain, there were but few empty cartridge-cases, compared with the number lying where my men had died, and by the fact of the track of the fleeing camel.

I retired to my tent, saying I wished to see no one for a day, and that I wanted no food.

It was a black and dreadful day for me, the man for whom those humble heroes had fought and died; and, for hours, dry sobs shook me from head to foot, and I was hard put to it to contain myself.

I did see someone, however—Miss Vanbrugh entered silently, dressed my rapidly healing wound, and then stroked my hair and brow and cheek so kindly, so gently, and with such deep understanding sympathy that I broke down.

I would have taken her in my arms, but that I would not trade on my misery and her sympathy; and without a word spoken between us, she went back to the *anderun*.

Did she understand at last? . . . Duty. . . . My duty to my General, my Service and my Country. . . .

THAT evening she was visited by the future Sheikh of the tribe that had first accepted the Emir, a charm-

ing and delightful little boy, dressed exactly like a grown man.

With him came his sister, a most lovely girl, the Sitt Leila Nakhla.

Her, the two girls found haughty, distant, disapproving, and I gathered that the visit was not a success—apart from the question of the language difficulty.

Bedouin women do not go veiled in their own villages and camps, and I saw this Arab "princess" at a feast given by her guardian, the white-bearded, delightful old gentleman, Dawad Fetata.

It was soon very clear to me that the Sitt Leila Nakhla worshiped the Emir; that the grandson of old Dawad Fetata worshiped the Sitt Leila Nakhla; and that the latter detested our Maudie, from whose face the Emir's eyes roved but seldom.

The little London sparrow was *the hated rival of a princess for the hand of a powerful ruler!* Oh, Songs of Araby and tales of fair Kashmir! What a world it is!

But what troubled me more than hate was love; the love that I could see dawning in the eyes of the Sheikh el Habibka as he sat beside Miss Vanbrugh and piled her with tidbits from the bowls.

I watched him like a lynx, and he me. *How* he hated me!

Time after time I saw him open his lips to speak, sigh heavily, and say nothing. But if he said nothing he did a good deal—including frequent repetitions of the Roumi "shake hands" custom, which he misinterpreted as a hold-hands habit.

He had learned the words, and would say, "*Shakand, Mees,*" from time to time, in what he thought was English.

And Mary? She was infinitely amused beyond all cause that I could see; and I was really angry when she glanced from me to the Sheikh el Habibka—he was holding her hand

warmly clasped in both of his—and quietly hummed in a conversational sort of voice:

Said the Bulbul, "Young man, is your life
so dull

That you're anxious to end your career?
For Infidel, know—that you've trod on the
toe

Of Abdul, the Bulbul Emir!"
The Bulbul then drew out his trusty chi-
boque,

And shouting out "Allah Akbar!"
Being also intent on slaughter, he went
For Ivan Petruski Skivah! . . .

This interested the Sitt Leila Nakhla not at all. She watched Maudie, while young Yussuf Fetata watched Leila. To me this girl was most charming, but because a little troublesome in her demands that I should translate every remark that Maudie made. I believe the Sitt's position in the tribe was unique, owing to her relationship to the future Sheikh, and the kind indulgence of the Emir, who treated her as a child.

The chief result of this feast was to increase anxiety and to add to my determination to bring my business to an issue and depart.

BUT now, alas, the attitude of the Emir and of his all-important and powerful Vizier toward me began to change. They grew less friendly and my position less that of guest than prisoner-guest, if not prisoner.

The most foolish proverb of the most foolish nation in the world is: "When you get near women you get near trouble."

But in this instance it seemed to apply.

Mary and Maudie were the trouble, for the Emir was undoubtedly falling in love with Maudie, and the Vizier with Mary.

I wondered what would have happened if they had both fallen in love with the same girl. I suppose one of them would have died suddenly, in

spite of the fact that they appeared to be more like brothers than master and servant.

And there was no hope in me for Maudie. Maudie blossomed and Maudie bloomed. If ever I saw a wildly-quietly, composedly - distractedly, madly-sanely happy woman, it was our Maudie.

She grew almost lovely. How many of us have an incredibly impossible beautiful dream—and find it come impossibly true? Maudie had dreamed of attar-scented, silk-clad, compelling but courtly Sheikhs, ever since she had read some idiotic trash; and now an attar-scented, silk-clad, compelling but courtly Sheikh *was* (in Maudie's words) "after" Maudie!

And Miss Vanbrugh? She, too, was happy as the day was long, albeit capricious; and though she did not encourage the Sheikh el Habibka, nor "flirt" exactly, she undoubtedly enjoyed his society as well as that of the Emir, and rode alone with either of them without fear. They must have been silent rides, with a strange dumb alphabet!

Nor would she listen to my words of warning.

"Don't you worry, Major de Beaujolais," she would say. "I tell you they are *all right*. Yes, *both* of them. I am just as safe with them as I am with you. And I'm *awfully* safe with you, Major Ivan, am I not?"

Women always know better than men, until they find they know nothing about the matter at all.

The next thing that I did not like was the giving of feasts to which the girls alone were invited; and then feasts at which Mary alone, or Maudie alone, was the guest.

However, such invitations were commands; of course, the feasts were held in the Emir's pavilion, which was but a few yards from our tent; the girls had their pistols; and I always

was ready for instant action, if I should hear a scream, when either of them were there alone.

Nor was there any great privacy observed, for servants were in and out with dishes, and unless there was a strong *gibli* blowing, the pavilion entrance was open.

But more and more I became a prisoner, and when I took my daily ride, it was with Marbruk ben Hassen and an escort—for my "protection."

THEN to me, one night, came the Emir and the Vizier, clearly on business bent. There was no *faddhling*. As soon as I had offered them seats upon the rugs and produced my last Turkish cigarettes, the Emir got to business.

"Touching the treaty with your Excellency's great country," he began, and my heart leaped with hope. "I will sign it—on terms. . . . On terms further than those named hitherto."

He stopped and appeared to be enjoying the Turkish cigarette intensely.

"And they are, Commander of the Faithful and Shadow of the Prophet?" I inquired.

"That you take the treaty signed and sealed by me, and witnessed by my Vizier and twelve *ekhwans*—and leave the two Sitts whom you brought here."

So it had come!

"That is impossible, Emir el Hamel el Kebir," I replied instantly, and he raised his big black eyebrows and gave me a supercilious, penetrating hawk-stare of surprise and anger.

"And *why*?" he inquired quietly.

"Because I do not *use* women. They put themselves under my protection," I replied, "and I have put myself and them under yours."

"And I am suggesting that they remain there," interrupted the Emir.

"For how long?" I sneered.

"That is for them to say," was the reply.

"Then let them say it," I answered. "Emir, I have treated you as a Bedouin Chief, a true Arab of the Desert, a man of chivalry, honor, hospitality and greatness. Would you, in return, speak to me of *trafficking in women*?"

To Hell with their treaty and their tribes! And then the face of my uncle, the words of his letter and memories of my life work rose before my eyes.

Neither of these girls was a French-woman. I had not asked them to come here. I had warned them against coming. I had told them plainly that I was going on a mission of national importance. And de Lannec. . . .

"Exit de Lannec!"

I STRODE up and down the tent, the two Arabs, calm, imperturbable, stroking their beards and watching me.

Suddenly I stopped before them, shook my fist in the Emir's very face and shouted:

"Damn your black face and blacker soul, you filthy hound! Get out of my tent before I throw you out, you low swine! . . . *White Women!* You black dogs and sons of dogs. . . .!" and, shaking with rage, I pointed to the doorway of my tent.

They rose and went; and with them went all my hopes of success.

What had I done? What *had* I done?

But Mary, sweet, lovely, distractingly fascinating Mary . . . and that black-bearded dog! . . .

Let France sink beneath the sea first!

I was unfit, utterly unfit, for the Secret Service. And tomorrow I would break my sword and burn my uniform and go back to my uncle, con-

fess what I had done—and enlist in the Foreign Legion.

Oh, splendid de Lannec! He was *right*, of course. . . . But this was ruin and the end of Henri de Beaujolais.

Then a voice through the felt wall that cut off my part of the tent from the *anderun* said:

"Your language certainly sounded bad, Major! I am glad I don't understand Arabic!"

I was not very sure that *I* was glad she did not. . . .

IT was the next morning that Miss Vanbrugh greeted me with the words:

"Major, you haven't congratulated me. . . . I had an honest-to-God offer of marriage from a leading citizen of this burg yesterday. I'm blushing still—inwardly."

I was horrified.

"From whom?" I asked.

"The Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir."

"Good God!" I groaned. Miss Vanbrugh, we shall have to walk very, very delicately."

"So'll the Sheikh-lad," observed Mary grimly.

"But how did he make the proposal?" I inquired, knowing that no one in the place could translate and interpret except myself.

"By signs and wonders," answered the girl. "*Some* wonders! He certainly made himself clear."

"Was he? Did he?" I stammered, hardly knowing how to ask if the ruffian had. . . . My blood boiled, though my heart sank and I knew that depth of trembling apprehension that is the real *Fear*; the fear for another whom we—well, care for.

"Now don't you go prying heavy-footed into a young thing's first love affair, Major, because I shan't stand for it," replied Miss Vanbrugh.

"Had you your pistol with you?" I asked.

"I *had*, Major," was the reply. "I don't get caught that way twice."

And I reflected that if the Sheikh el Habibka was still alive, he had not been violent.

THAT day I was not allowed to ride out for exercise, and a big Sudanese sentry was posted closer to my tent door.

Hitherto I had felt myself under strict surveillance; now I was under actual arrest, and probably under sentence of death.

The girls were invited, or ordered, to go riding as usual, and my frame of mind can be imagined.

Nothing could save them, nothing could now bring about the success of my mission, unless it were the greed of these insulted Arabs for gold. I was a wretchedly impotent puppet in their hands. What could I do to protect the woman whom I had brought here? The woman I was quite sure now—I loved.

I had been falling in love with her from the first. I had thought myself to be in love with her by the time our journey was half-completed.

Now I knew that she was the only woman in the world, and that she was so dear to me that Life, Success, Duty, France herself, were as nothing in the balance against her.

CHAPTER XV

THEIR SECOND STRING

THAT night I was honored by a visit from the Hadji Abdul Salem, the chief *marabout* and *hakim* of this particular tribe, and a man whose immense influence and power seemed disproportionate to his virtues and merits.

One of the things the occidental mind can never grasp is the way in which the oriental mind can divorce

Faith from Works, the office from its holder, and yield unstinted veneration to the holy *priest*, knowing him to be, at the same time a worthless and scoundrelly *man*.

The good Hadji crept silently into my tent, in the dead of night, and very nearly got a bullet through his scheming brain.

Seeing that he was alone and apparently unarmed, I put my pistol under my pillow again, and asked him what he wanted.

The Reverend - Father - in - Islam wanted to talk—in whispers—if I would take a most solemn oath to reveal nothing he said. I was more than ready, and we talked of Cabbages and Kings, and also of Sealing-Wax and Whether Pigs had Wings. . . . and, after a while, we talked of Murder—or rather the Holy One did so. He either trusted to my keeping faith with him, or knew he could repudiate anything I might say against him later.

I had a touch of fever again, and I was still in the state of mental turmoil natural to one who has just seen the edifice of a life's labor go crashing to the earth, and yet sits rejoicing among the ruins—thanking God for *failure*; his mind moaning a funeral dirge over the grave of all his hopes and strivings, his heart chanting a pæan of praise and thanksgiving over the saving of his Self.

THE Reverend-Father-in-Islam said he had a proposal to make.

This was that he should contrive to effect my escape, and that I should return with an army, defeat the Emir, and make the Hadji Abdul Salem ruler in his place.

An alternative was suggested by the probable assassination of the Emir by one Suleiman the Strong, of whom I knew, and who was even now somewhere in the Great Oasis, and

had visited the tent of the Holy Hadji!

Would I, on the death of the Emir, help the Hadji to seize the Seat of Power? He could easily poison Suleiman the Strong when he had fulfilled his vengeance—and his usefulness—or denounce him to the Tribe as the murderer of the Emir and have him impaled alive.

The pious man swore he would be a true and faithful friend to France.

"As you are to your master, the Emir?" I asked.

The Hadji replied that the Emir was a usurper, and that no one owed fealty to a usurper.

Moreover, this was positively my only chance, as I was to be put to death shortly. The Emir might then send a deputation to the Governor-General of French Africa, offering to make an alliance on receipt of a subsidy of a million francs and other advantages, and swearing that no emissary of the Governor-General's had ever reached him.

Or he might just let the matter rest—merely keeping the women, killing me, and washing his hands of French affairs, or, rather declining to dirty his hands with them. Or, of course, Suleiman might get him, and then the Wazir could be eliminated, and the good Hadji, with French support, could become the Emir and the Friend of France.

"Supposing you could enable me to escape," I said, when the good Hadji had finished. "I should not do so without the women. Could you effect their escape with me?"

He could not and would not.

Two faithful slave-women slept across the entrance to the *anderun*, where the girls were. Even if the slaves could be killed silently, it would be impossible to get so big a party away from the place; many camels, much food, *girbas* of water . . . No, he could only manage it for me alone.

He could visit me at night, and I could leave the tent in his *burnous* and green turban. He could easily bribe or terrify a certain Arab soldier, now on sentry-go outside, and who was bound to be on duty at my tent again sooner or later. I could simply ride for dear life, with two good camels, and take my chance.

But the women—*no*. Besides, if it ever came out that he had helped *me* to escape, it would not be so bad. But as for getting the women away—he simply would not consider it.

No. If I were so extremely anxious about the fate of my two women (and Merciful Allah! what are *women*, that serious men should bother about them?) the best thing I could do was to consider his firm and generous offer—the heads of the Emir and his Vizier on a charger, and the faithful friendship to France of their successor-in-power, the Hadji Abdul Salem.

The Emir had announced his intention of making the boy-Sheikh not only Sheikh of his Tribe, but eventually Emir of the Confederation also. The Hadji would be the young prince's Spiritual Guide, Tutor, Guardian and Regent—until the time came to cut the lad's throat.

"So Suleiman the Strong is here, and is going to assassinate the Emir, is he?" I said, after we had sat eyeing each other, warily and in silence, for some minutes.

"Yes," replied the Hadji, "and where will you be *then*, if I am your enemy?"

"Where I am now, I expect," I replied, yawning with a nonchalance wholly affected.

"And your women?" asked the good man.

I ground my teeth, and my fingers itched to seize this scoundrel's throat.

"Take my advice and *go*," he continued. "Go with certainty that you will have done what you came for—made an indissoluble and everlasting

treaty of alliance between Franzawi and the Great Confederation, through their real ruler, the Hadji Abdul Salem, Regent for the young Emir after the assassination of the Emir el Hamel el Kebir, impostor and usurper. And if he is not assassinated, no matter—come with an army—and a million francs, of course—kill him, and make the boy nominal Emir. . . . I swear by the Sacred Names of God that France shall be as my father and my mother, and I will be France's most obedient child. Go, Sidi, while you can. . . ."

"Get two facts clearly and firmly into your noble mind, Holy One," I replied. "The first is that I do not leave this place without the lady Sitts; and the second is that France has no dealings whatever in assassination—nor with assassins."

Then the reverend gentleman played his trump card.

"You are in even greater danger than you think, Sidi," he murmured, smiling wryly with his mouth and scowling fiercely with his eyes. "And our honorable, gracious and fair-dealing Lord the Emir el Hamel el Kebir is but playing with you as the cat with the mouse."

"*For you are not the only mouse in his trap.* Oh, no—not by any means. What are Roumi brains against those of the Arabs, the most wise, learned, subtle and ancient of all the races of the earth? Why, you poor fool, *there are other messengers from another Power*, here, in the Great Oasis. And our fair-spoken lord gives them audience daily in their camp."

I sprang to my feet. Could this scoundrel be speaking the truth? A cold fear settled on my heart. What likelihood was there of my leaving this place alive, if this were true and my own folly and madness had driven the insulted Emir into the arms of these agents of some other Power?

My life was nothing. But what of

the fate of Mary Vanbrugh when my throat was cut?

I broke out into a cold perspiration and the fever left me. My brain grew clearer and began to act more quickly. I smiled derisively and shook an incredulous head.

"And suppose I showed you their camp, Sidi?" sneered the Hadji. "Suppose I gave you the opportunity to see a disguised Roumi and to speak to him?"

"Why—then I should be convinced," I replied, and added, "And that would certainly change—my—er—attitude toward you and your proposals. When I have seen these men, and spoken with them, you may visit me again, with the advantage to your purse."

I must play this foul-feeding fish on a long line, and match his tricks with tricks of my own. If it was to be "Roumi" brains against Arab brains here also—well, we would see what we should see.

"What manner of man is the leader of these emissaries of another Power?" I asked. "How many of them are there? What is the Emir's attitude? Tell me all you can. I can buy true information at a high price."

"So can these others," grinned the pious Hadji. "The leader has already shaken a bag of good fat Turkish *medjidies* before my eyes, and promised it, in return for any help."

"I could shake a bag of something better than that dirty depreciated Turkish rubbish before your eyes, Hadji," I replied, "and pour it into your lap too. Fine new coins of pure gold! French twenty-franc pieces! Beautiful for woman's chains and bangles, and even more beautiful to spend on fine raiment, tents, camels, weapons, food, servants, rugs, horses. . . ."

The rascal's eyes glittered.

"How many, Sidi?" he asked.

"As many as you earn. . . . As

many as your help is worth. . . . now talk."

"It is a small caravan, Sidi," began this saintly *marabout*, "but very well equipped. There is plenty of money behind it. I never saw better camels nor weapons, and their hired camel-men are well-paid and content."

"I do not know from whom they really come, but they have the blessing of the Father of the Faithful, God's Vicar upon Earth, who rules at Stamboul; and they have the help and countenance of the Great Sheikh of the Senussi. They say this openly in *mejliss*; and prove it with documents, passes, *firman*s and letters. But they talk privately at night with the Emir and the Wazir."

"What do they offer, openly?" I asked.

"The friendship and protection of the King of Kings, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Father of the Faithful, who dwells at Stamboul; and the friendship and alliance of the powerful Sheikh el Senussi. A great Pan-Islamic Alliance is being formed in readiness for a certain Day of *Jehad*."

"And in private?" I asked.

"That I do not know," was the reply. "Only that dog of a Wazir—may swine defile the graves of his ancestors—knoweth the mind of the Emir; and he alone accompanies him to the tents of the Roumis."

"But this I *do* know. They will give me wealth untold *if I will poison you and the two Sitts*, whom they declare to be female spies of the French, sent to beguile and debauch the Emir with their charms."

"How do they know of our presence here?" I asked quietly, though my blood boiled.

"Oh, I visit them. . . . I visit them. . . . And we talk. . . . We talk. . . . They say I might, if I preferred, kill you and seize the Sitts for my *hareem* for a while, before I either

slay them or cut out their tongues. *Dumb women are the only discreet ones.*"

I managed to smile coldly while I burned hotly with fury and rage—and changed the subject.

"Are they great men, lords, Sidis, born leaders, these emissaries?" I asked.

"No," replied the Hadji. "They are low men on high horses. They do not walk, speak, look, give, ride, eat, nor act as men of noble birth."

Through a narrow aperture at the entrance to my tent I could see that the stars were paling.

"You shall take me to their camp—*now*—Hadji," I said and pulled on *burnous*, *haik*, *Kafiyeh* and *sil-sil* boots. The Hadji seemed a little startled.

"It would not look well from me to be seen visiting their camp now," he said. "It will soon be light."

"You need not visit their camp," I replied. "Take me to where I can see it, and then disappear."

The good man sat a while in thought.

"How much, Sidi?" he asked.

"I am not like those others," I replied. "I do not shake bags of money in the faces of pious and honest men, nor haggle and bargain. I richly reward those who serve me well—*very* richly—when their service is completed. Now do as I say, or go away and let me sleep in peace, for this chatter wearies me." And I yawned.

The Hadji went to the doorway and colloqued with the soldier without.

Returning, he said that he had dispatched my sentry to inform the guard at the camp of the emissaries that a man would shortly visit the latter, and must not be challenged, as he came from the Emir on secret business. The countersign was "Stamboul."

"This fellow, one Gharibeel Zariug is entirely faithful to me, Sidi,"

he added, "you can always send me messages by his mouth. I can arrange that he is very frequently on guard over your tent."

We sat in silence for a few minutes, a silence broken by the Hadji's request for a taste of the *sharab* of the Infidels.

I gave the good man a sip of cognac and I believe this bound him to my interests more strongly than gold would have done. He had all the stigmata of the secret drunkard, and his tongue continually flickered at his lips like that of a snake.

The soldier returned and whispered.

"Come, Sidi," said the Hadji, "I will take you as far as is safe."

"Safe for me or for you?" I asked.

"Nowhere is safe for *you*, Sidi," was the reply. "Take my advice and flee for your life—to return with an army, and a treaty which I will sign as Regent."

I did my best by careful noting of direction, the stars, clumps of trees, tents, water-runnels and stones, to insure my being able to make the return journey.

After we had walked for about a mile, the Hadji stopped in the black shadow of some palms and pointed to an orderly cluster of tents, just visible from where we stood.

"That is their camp, Sidi," said the Hadji, "and beyond those palms are their camel-lines and servants' quarters, and the bivouac of a Camel Corps section—provided for the—ah—protection of the party."

And, without another word, the Reverend-Father-in-Islam vanished.

I WALKED boldly across to the principal tent, ignored the distant sentry, and entered.

Two men slept on rugs, one an obvious oriental, the other slightly fairer of complexion and with heavy mustache and beard.

I studied his face by the light of the lantern that hung from the tent-pole, and learned nothing from it. But I suspected a disguised European.

The man's hands were larger than those of an Arab, and there was more color in what I could see of his cheeks than I should expect in those of a native.

Turning to the lamp, I unhooked it and held it to his face, so that the light fell upon it while mine was in the shadow thrown by the back of the lamp—a common bazaar affair of European make, such as hangs on the walls of the cheap hotels of Algeria and Tunis. I then drew a bow at a venture.

I struck the sleeper heavily on the chest, and as he opened his eyes and sat up, said coolly:

"*Bonjour, mon cher Monsieur Becque!*"

My shaft winged true.

"*Himmel!*" he exclaimed, half awake and startled into unguarded speech. And then, collecting his scattered wits, said in French: "What is it? Who are you?" and his hand went under his pillow.

"Keep still!" I said sternly as my automatic came from under my burnous, and he looked into the muzzle of it.

And as he looked, the cast in his left eye was obvious.

"Who are you?" he said again in French.

And then a third voice added, in the same tongue: "Whoever you are, drop that pistol! *Quick!* I have you covered."

Like a fool, I had absolutely forgotten the second man in my excitement at discovering that it was indeed Becque, the man whom Raoul d'Auray de Redon had seen in Zanguig before its occupation by the French. My old Friend *Becque!*

An awkward dilemma!

If I dropped my automatic I

should be at their mercy, and if I did not I should probably be shot in the back and buried in the sand beneath their tent. For even if they did not know who I was, they knew—thanks to the triple traitor, Abdul Salam—that I was a rival and an enemy.

How neatly should I be removed from their path! None but the rogue Abdul Salam knew that I was aware of their existence, much less that I had actually entered their tent.

The sentry of course did not know me, in my disguise, and the sound of the pistol-shot would easily be explained, if it were heard and inquiries were made. An accident. . . . A shot at a prowling pariah cur or jackal that had entered the tent and alarmed one of them, suddenly awakened.

I should simply disappear, and my disappearance would be a soon-forgotten mystery, and probably ascribed to sudden flight prompted by fear. For had I not abused the Emir with unforgettable and unforgivable insults?

And then what of Mary Vanbrugh and Maudie—"the French female spies sent to beguile and debauch the Emir and win his consent to the treaty?"

Mary Vanbrugh would think I had fled, deserting her, in the name of Duty!

ALL this flashed through my mind like lightning. What should I do? What about a shot into Becque's vile heart and a swift wheel-about, and a shot at the Arab?

No—he would fire in the same second that I shot Becque, and he could not miss me at a range of six feet. Nor could I, even in such a situation, shoot a defenceless man in his bed.

Perhaps a couple of seconds had passed, and then the voice be-

hind me spoke again with sharp menace—

"Quick! I am going to shoot!"

"So am I," said yet a fourth voice coolly, in Arabic, and even in that moment I marveled that the Arab speaker should so aptly have gathered the import of the French words—though actions, of course, speak louder than words.

I recognized the voice of the Wazir, inevitable shadow of his master. Keeping Becque covered, I turned my head. Two excellent European revolvers threatened the Arab who, green with fright, put his automatic on the ground.

I put my own into the holster beneath my burnous.

Evidently the Emir was making one of his unobtrusive visits to the excellent Becque, and he had come in the nick of time. Or was he so well served that he had known of my visit here, and come to catch me and Becque together?

"*Kief halak*, Emir el Hamel el Kebir," I said coolly. "The sound of thy voice is sweet in my ears and the sight of thy face as the first gleam of the rising sun."

"In the circumstances, I do not doubt it, Roumi," was the reply, "for you stood at the Gates of Death. What do you here?"

"I am visiting an old friend, Sidi Emir," I replied, "and my purpose is to resume a discussion, interrupted, owing to circumstances beyond his control, many years ago."

The Emir and the Wazir, their inscrutable penetrating eyes fixed on mine, stared in thoughtful silence.

"Explain," said the Emir, at length.

"Lord Emir of Many Tents and Ruler of Many Tribes, Leader of the Faithful and Shadow of the Prophet," I said, "you are a person of honor; a warrior; a man of your hands, as well as a man of your

word. . . . Like me, you are a soldier.

"Now, I once honored this dog, for an excellent reason, by crossing swords with him. For an even better and greater reason I would cross swords with him again, and finish, utterly and completely, the duel begun so long ago. I tell you, a lover of your People, that this cur would betray his People. I tell you, a respecter of women, that this reptile is trying to achieve the dishonor and death of two noble women.

"You may think I wish merely to kill one who is a rival for your favor and alliance. Were *that* all he is, I would not try to defeat him thus. I would meet a fair adversary with fair attempts to out-bid and out-manuever him. But as he has secretly plotted against my country, and his; against the lives and honor of the Lady Sitts, and against my life, I ask you to let me meet him face to face and foot to foot and sword to sword, that I may punish him and rid my country of a matricidal renegade."

The two Sheikhs stared in silence, stroking their beards, their hard unreadable eyes, enigmatic, faintly mocking, watching my face unwaveringly.

"Swords are sharp and final arguments, and some quarrels can only be settled with them," mused the Emir. "What says our other honored guest—"

"Oh, I'll fight him," spoke up Becque. "It will give me real pleasure to kill this chatter-box."

He turned to me with a smile that lifted one corner of his mouth and showed a gleaming dog-tooth.

"And so you are the bright de Beaujolais, are you!" he marveled. "Well, well, well! Think of that now! De Beaujolais—the Beau Sabreur of the Blue Hussars! De Beaujolais, the Beau Sabreur of the Spahis and the Secret Service! De

Beaujolais, the Hero of Zinderneuf!" Well, my friend, I'll make you de Beaujolais of a little hole in the sand, shortly, and see you where the birds won't trouble you—and you won't trouble me! The great and clever de Beaujolais! *Ha! Ha! Ha!*"

And the brave, brazen rogue roared with laughter.

(But how in the name of his father the Devil did he know anything of the affair at Zinderneuf?)

"You shall fight as soon as the light is good," said the Emir, "and you shall fight with Arab swords—a strange weapon to each of you, and therefore fair for both."

And calling to Yusuf Fetata, he bade him send for two swords of equal length and weight and of exactly similar shape.

CHAPTER XVI

"MEN HAVE THEIR EXITS"

HALF an hour later, Becque and I stood face to face in the shadow of a great clump of palms.

We were stripped to the waist, and wore only baggy Arab trousers and soft boots.

Each held a noble, two-edged sword, pliant as cane, sharp as a razor, exact model of those brought to the country by Louis the Good and his Crusaders. I verily believe they were Crusaders' swords, for there are many such in that dry desert where nothing rusts and a good sword is more prized, cared for, and treasured than a good woman.

The only fault I had to find with my beautiful crusader-sword was that it had no hand-guard, nothing between handle and blade but a thin straight cross-piece. However, the same applied to Becque's weapon.

I looked at Becque. He "peeled

well," as English boxers say; was finely muscled, and in splendid condition. Whether the strangeness of our weapons would be in his favor as a stronger, less finished swordsman, or in mine, remained to be seen.

He spat onto his right hand—coarse and vulgar as ever—and swung his sword mightily, trying its weight and balance.

In a little group under the trees stood the Emir; the Wazir, young Yussuf Fetata (to whose family the swords belonged); the powerful dwarf who had first captured me, Marbruk ben Hassan; the Emir's body-servant, El R'Orab the Crow; the Egyptian-Arab colleague of Becque, and a few soldiers.

"Hear my words," said the Emir, and his hawk-like stare was turned to Becque, "for the least attempt at foul play, I will shoot you dead. When I say '*Begin*'—do so. When I say '*Stop*,' do so instantly. I shall not say '*Stop*' while both of you are on your feet, unless one of you does anything unbecoming a chivalrous warrior."

I bowed and gave the Emir the sword-salute.

"*Begin!*" he said a moment later; and Becque repeated the very tactics of our previous duel.

He rushed at me like a tiger, his sword moving like forked lightning, and I gave my whole mind and body to parry and defence. I was not in the best of health and strength, thanks to my wound, my sleepless nights of anxiety, and my confinement to the tent; and if Becque chose to force the pace and tire himself, I was content.

All critics of my "form" have praised my foot-work, and I used my feet and brain to save my arm, for the swords were heavy.

At the end of his first wild whirling attack, when his sword ceased

for a moment to rise and fall like a flail in the hands of a madman, I fainted for his head, and, as his sword went up, I lunged as though I held a sabre.

He sprang back like a cat, and then made a maltese-cross pattern with his sword, as though he were a Highlander wielding a light claymore, when I pursued. Nothing could pass that guard—but it was expensive work, costly in strength and breath, and he was very welcome to make that impressive display, and I kept him at it, by light and rapid feints.

Suddenly his sword went up and back, as to smite straight down upon my skull, and, judging that I had time for the maneuver, I did not parry, but sprang to my left and slashed in a smart *coup de flanc* that took him across the ribs, beneath the raised right arm.

A little higher and he would never have lifted his arm again; but, as it was, I gave him a gash that would mean a nice little blood-letting. In the same second, his sword fell perpendicularly on my right thigh, neatly slicing off an inconsiderable—shall I say "rasher"—and touching no artery nor vein of importance.

I had drawn first blood—first by a fraction of a second—and I had inflicted a wound and received a graze.

I saw momentary fear in Becque's eyes, but knew it was only fear that I had wounded him too severely for him to continue the fight.

He began to retreat; he retreated quickly; he almost ran backward for a few paces, and, as I swiftly followed, he ducked most cleverly and swiftly, below my sword—as it cut sideways at his neck—and lunged splendidly at my breast.

A side-step only just saved me, for his point and one edge ploughed

along the flesh of my left side and the other edge cut my upper arm as it rested for the moment against my body. But the quick riposte has always been my strong point, and, before his sword returned on guard, I cut him heavily across the head.

Unfortunately it was only a back-handed blow, delivered as my sword returned to guard, and it was almost the hilt that struck him. Had it been the middle of the edge—even at such close quarters and back-handed—the cut would have been more worthy of the occasion. As it was, it did friend Becque no good at all.

And then my opponent changed his tactics and used his sword two-handed.

One successful stroke delivered thus would lop off a limb or sever a head from a body; but though the force of every blow is doubled in value, the quickness of every parry is halved, and, since my opponent chose to turn his weapon into a mace, I turned mine into a foil, instead of obediently following his tactics. It was rhinoceros against leopard now, strong dog against quick cat; possibly Goliath against David.

Hitherto we had crossed swords point-downward, as in "sabres"; now I held mine point-upward as in "foils," and dodged and danced on my toes, feinting for a thrust. Cut or thrust?

A cut from Becque would be death for De Beaujolais; and I was very sure a thrust from De Beaujolais would be death for Becque.

My foe forced the pace again. He rushed like a bull, and I dodged like a matador. A hundred times his sword swept past my head like a mighty scythe, and so swift was he that never had I any chance for the matador's stroke—the *coup de grace*.

We were both panting, our breath whistling through parched throats and mouths, our bare chests heaving like bellows. We were streaming with sweat and blood, and, with glaring glassy eye, Becque was fiercely scowling, and he was hoarsely croaking.

"Curse you, you damned dancing-master! God smite you! . . . Blast you, you jumping monkey!" with each terrific stroke, and de Beaujolais was smiling and whispering "*Mary Vanbrugh . . . Mary . . . Mary. . .*"

But, believe me, de Beaujolais was weakening, for he had lost a lot of blood, his left arm was a useless weight of lead, he was growing giddy and sick and faint; and suddenly Becque, with a look of devilish hate and rage upon his contorted face, swept his sword once more above his head—and this time, *swept it up too far!*

It was well above his head, and pointing downward behind him, for a stroke that should cleave me to the chin, when I dropped my point and lunged with all my strength and speed.

"*Mary Vanbrugh!*"

I HAD won. My sword stood out a foot behind him.

He tottered and fell.

My knees turned to water and I collapsed across his body.

"*Exit Becque!*" thought I, as I went down, "and perhaps Beaujolais too!"

I RECOVERED in a few minutes, to find that the Emir himself was holding my head and pouring glorious cold water on my face, chest and hands. The Wazir was washing my cuts.

Becque was not dead; but, far from surgeons and hospitals, no man could long survive the driving of that huge sword through his body.

Poor devil!

"The Sitt has bandages and cordials," I said to the Emir, as I rose to my feet, and he at once dispatched R'Orab the Crow to bid the slave-girls of the *anderun* ask the lady Sitt to send what was needed for a wounded man.

I did what I could for the unconscious Becque and then resumed my *jellabia haik kafiyeh* and *burnous*, after drinking deeply of the cool water and dabbing my bleeding wounds.

The congratulatory Arabs crowded round me, filled with admiration of the victor. Would they have done the same with Becque, if he had won? Nothing succeeds like success. To him that hath shall be given. . . . *Vae victis*. Thumbs down for the loser.

"Do you send for medicaments for yourself or for your enemy, Sidi?" asked the Emir.

"For my enemy, Emir," I replied. "It is the Christian custom."

"But he is your enemy," said the Emir.

"Anyone can help an injured friend," I replied. "If that is held to be a virtue, how much more is it a virtue to help a fallen foe?" Sententious—but suitable to the company and the occasion.

The Emir smiled and shook my hand in European fashion, and the Wazir followed his example.

I was in high favor and regard—for the moment—as the winner of a good stout fight.

For the moment!

What of the morrow, when their chivalrous fighting blood had cooled and my foul insults and abuse were remembered?

AND then appeared Mary Vanbrugh, following El R'Orab, who carried the medicine chest and a bottle and some white stuff; lint or cotton-wool and bandages.

I might have known that she would

not merely send the necessary things, when she heard of wounds and injuries.

She glanced at the semi-conscious Becque, a hideous gory spectacle, and then at me. I suppose I looked haggard and disheveled and there was a little blood on my clothes; and also I held the good sword, that had perhaps saved her life and honor in my hand.

"Your work?" she said in a voice of ice and steel.

I did not deny it.

"More Duty?" she asked most bitterly, and her voice was scathing. Then sharply and coldly: "Tell these men to bring me a lot more water, and to make a stretcher with spears or tent-poles and some rugs. She got to work like a trained nurse. 'Tear up a clean *burnous*, or something, in long strips," she said as I knelt to help her. "And then get out of my sight!"

But as more blood oozed through from my thigh, ribs and arms, she asked: "Are you hurt, too?"

"A little," I replied.

"I am glad you *are*," said Miss Mary Vanbrugh. "It serves you right." And then: "Suppose it had been *you* lying here dying?"

I supposed it, and thanked God that it was not—for her sake.

When she had cleaned, sterilized and bandaged Becque's ghastly wound, she bade me tell the Arabs to have him carried to the Guest Tent and laid on my bed, that she might nurse him! Her orders were obeyed and, under her superintendence, the wounded man was carried away with all possible care.

I noticed that the Emir bade Yusuf Fetata conduct the Egyptian Arab back to his tent, and see that he did not leave it.

When everything possible had been done for Becque, and he lay on my bed, motionless and only impercept-

ibly breathing, Mary Vanbrugh turned to me.

"I'll attend to *you* now, Killer."

"Thank you, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied. "I can attend to what scratches I have, quite well."

She looked at me, as in doubt. Her instinctive love of mothering and succoring the injured seemed to be at war with her instinctive hatred of those who caused injury.

"Let me see the wound in your side," she said. "If you can look after your leg yourself, you cannot dress and bandage a wound in the ribs properly."

"I wouldn't trouble you for worlds, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied. "Doubtless the noted Dr. Hadji Abdul Salam will treat me. These Arab specialists have some quite remarkable methods, such as making one swallow an appropriate quotation from the Q'ran, written on paper or rag, correctly blessed and suitably sanctified. Do me a lot of good I should think . . . And possibly Maudie would lend a hand if the doctor thinks a bandage."

And then, loss of blood following a terrific fight—on an empty stomach—had its humiliating effect on my already enfeebled body, and down I went in a heap.

WHEN I recovered consciousness, Mary Vanbrugh and a very white-faced Maudie were in the tent, and I was lying, bandaged, on some rugs.

Dear Becque and I—side by side!

"Brandy," said Mary Vanbrugh to Maudie, as I opened my eyes. Maudie poured some out and gave it to me. I drank the cognac and was very soon my own man again. How often was this drama to be repeated? First the Touareg bullet; now Becque's sword. What would the third be?

I sat up and got to my feet, stiff, sore, bruised and giddy, but by no means a "cot case."

"Lie down again, at once," said Miss Vanbrugh sharply.

"Thank you, Miss Vanbrugh," I replied. "I am all right again now, and greatly regret the trouble I have given you. I am most grateful . . ."

"I do not desire your gratitude," interrupted the pale, competent, angry girl.

" . . . to Becque—I was going to say—for being so tender with me," I continued.

And then I said a thing that I have regretted ever since; and when I think of it, I have to find some peace in the excuse that I was a little off my balance.

"It is not so long since you were fairly glad of the killing powers of a 'Killer,' Miss Vanbrugh," I went on, and felt myself a cad as I said it. "On a certain roof in Zaguig, the Killer against seven, and your life in the balance . . . I apologize for reminding you . . . I am ashamed . . ."

"I am ashamed . . . I apologize humbly, Major de Beaujolais," she replied, and her eyes were slightly suffused, as I took her hand and pressed it to my lips. . . . "But oh! Why do you . . . why must you . . . all these fine men . . . that Mr. Dufour, Achmet, Djikki;—and now this poor mangled butchered creature! Can you find *no* Duty that is help and kindness and love—instead of this Duty of killing, maiming, hurting . . ."

BECQUE rallied that night, incredibly. His strong spirit flickered, burnt clearly and then flared up. I was getting myself a drink, being consumed with thirst, when he spoke.

"So you win, De Beaujolais," he said feebly.

"I win, Becque," I replied.

I would not rejoice over a fallen foe, and I would not express regret to a matricidal renegade and a treacherous cur—who, moreover, had plot-

ted the death, mutilation and dishonor of two white girls—and one of them *Mary Vanbrugh!*

"It's a queer world," he mused. "You all but got me at Zinderneuf and I all but got you . . . An empty revolver saved me, and the Arabs saved you."

I supposed this to be the semi-delirious wanderings of a fevered mind. But how on earth did Becque know anything of Zinderneuf?

"What do you mean?" I said, more for the sake of saying something than seriously to ask a question.

"Ah—the brilliant De Beaujolais—Beau Sabreur of the Blue Hussars and the Spahis! Bright particular star of the *Bureau Arabe*, the Secret Service, the Intelligence Department of the French Army in Africa—You think you know a lot, don't you? and you're very pleased with your beautiful self? But you didn't know it was I who turned your men at Tokotu and Zinderneuf from down-trodden slaves into blood-thirsty mutineers, did you?"

"And you were never nearer death in all your days . . . Do you know, my clever friend, that if those cursed Arabs had not attacked at that moment, your next words would have been your last? Do you know that we were going to hang you to the flag-staff and then burn the place and march off? . . . '*Another mutiny in the discontented and rotten French Army!*' Headlines in the foreign Press! Encouragement to the enemies of France! . . . That would have been the sixth mutiny I had engineered."

I thought hard, and cast back in my memory.

Zinderneuf.

The mutiny which Dufour had warned me would break out directly I ordered the men to enter that silent fort, garrisoned by the Dead, every

man on his feet and at his post . . . Becque must have been there!

Impossible!

But, no—quite possible. I knew but little of those Legionaries—none of them as individuals; none of them by face or name.

I remembered two splendid Americans—whom I had also sent to their deaths, by thirst or Arabs, in an attempt to warn St. André and his Senegalese. . . . I remembered the trumpeter who had volunteered to enter the fort—silent, garrisoned by the dead, bolted and barred.

Of course, that trumpeter was one of the three Gestes, as I learned when I went to be George Lawrence's best man at his marriage to Lady Brandon. I remembered the fine Sergeant Lebaudy and Corporal Brille, and I remembered—yes, it must be!

I remembered the scoundrel *Rastignac* at whose head I had presented my revolver when he disobeyed my orders—disobeyed them flatly and insolently, before the men—and whose life was only saved by the fact that my revolver was empty.

So Rastignac was Becque . . . Becque was Rastignac! . . .

And what was it Dufour had said about him, when he warned me that the men were going to mutiny?

"This Rastignac is a hero to these fools. He is their leader—their hero and their leader; and he is a mutinous dog . . ." or words to that effect.

What had happened when my revolver did not go off?

He had laughed, and I had felt I *could* not load the thing before his very eyes and shoot him then in cold blood. No, I had put him under arrest and sent him for General Court Martial. He must either have served his time in the Zephyrs or escaped . . . All those years ago . . .

He had very nearly caused my death and I had very nearly caused his. And now we had met again, and

I had killed him . . . God moves in a mysterious way . . .

"So you were Rastignac, were you, Becque?" I replied coolly. "What a lot of trouble would have been saved had my revolver been loaded at that moment. I had just emptied it, riding up to the fort, firing six shots in the air as a salute to the brave and a notification of my approach to what I supposed to be careless and unwatchful sentries. On so small a thing hangs so much—possibly the fate of the French Empire in Africa."

"I hope so," replied Becque. "I hope this Emir will do to you and your women what I have begged him—and tried to bribe him—to do."

I kept silent, for the man was dying.

"You are not out of the wood yet, beautiful de Beaujolais—*Beau Sabreur*," the cruel, bitter voice went on. "My colleague has a brain, and he has money, too. Also the power to put down franc for franc against you or anybody else, and then double it . . . Oh, we shall win . . . And I'd give my soul to survive to see the hour of success—and you impaled living on a sharpened palm-trunk and your Secret Service women given to the Sudanese soldiers."

I bit my lips and kept silence, for the man was surely dying.

IN spite of the considered opinion of which Miss Vanbrugh had delivered herself, I am a humane man, and if I fight my foe as a soldier should fight him, I try to be *cans rancune* when the fight is over.

While Becque was awake and conscious, I would sit with him, bear with his vileness, and do what I could to assuage the sufferings of his last hours.

Sometimes men change and relent and repent on their deathbeds; and though I am not a religious man, I hold tenaciously to what is good and

right, and if approaching death brought a better frame of mind to Becque, I would do everything in my power to encourage and develop it.

I would meet him more than half way, and if his change of heart were real, I would readily forgive him, in the name of France and of Mary Vanbrugh.

"Well, Becque," I said, "I shall do my best against your colleague; and I would give a great deal 'to survive to see the hour of success' and you, not impaled living, but speeded on your way, with a safe conduct, back to whence you come."

"You mealy-mouthed liar," replied my gentleman, "You have killed me and there you sit and *gloat*."

"Nonsense, Becque," I replied, "I am glad I won the fight—but I'd do anything I could to help or ease or comfort you, poor chap."

"Another lie, you canting hypocrite and swine," Becque answered me.

"No," I said. "The simple truth..."

"*Prove it, then*," was the quick answer.

"Well?" I asked, and rose to get him anything he wanted, or to do anything that he might desire.

"Look you, De Beaujolais," he said. "You are a soldier. So am I. We have both lived hard, and my time has come. Nothing can possibly save me—here, in the desert, without surgeons, anesthetics, oxygen, antiseptics. And I may linger for days, wounded as I am. I *know* that nothing on God's earth can save me. So do you . . . Then let me die *now* and like a soldier . . . Not like a sick cow in the straw . . . *Shoot me, De Beaujolais*."

"I can't," I replied.

"No—as I said—you are a mealy-mouthed liar, and a canting hypocrite, full of words and words."

"I can't murder you, Becque," I said.

"You *have*," he replied. "Can't

you complete your job? No! The bold and beautiful de Beaujolais couldn't do that—he could only gloat upon his handiwork and spin out the last hours of the man he had killed. You and your Arab-debauching women from the stews of Paris,” and he spat,

“One of those women worked over you, like a nurse or a mother, Becque,” I said. “She lavished her tiny store of cognac, *eau de cologne*, antiseptics and surgery-stuff on you.”

“As I said,” he interrupted, “to keep me alive . . . gloat . . .”

Silence fell on that hot dimly-lighted tent, and I sat and watched this Becque.

After a while he spoke again:

“De Beaujolais,” he said, “I make a last appeal as a soldier to a soldier. Don't keep me alive, in agony, for days—knowing that I shall be a mortifying mass of gangrene and corruption before I die . . . Knowing that nothing can save me . . . I appeal to you, to you on whose head my blood is, to spare me *that* . . . Put your pistol near me—and let Becque die as he has lived, with a weapon in his hand . . .”

I thought rapidly.

“Come, come, de Beaujolais, it is not much to ask, surely. It leaves *your* lily-white hands clean and saves your conscience the reproach that you let me suffer tortures that the Arabs themselves would spare me.”

I came to a decision.

“De Beaujolais, if I have the ghost of a chance of life, refuse my request. If I have no chance, and you *know* I have none—as surely as you know the sun will rise—then, if you are a man, a human creature with a spark of humane feeling in you—put your pistol by my hand . . . You can turn your back if you are squeamish . . . Do it, De Beaujolais, and I will die forgiving you and repenting my sin . . .”

His voice broke, and I swallowed a lump in my throat as I rose and went to where my revolver hung to the tent-pole. My sword had passed below his lungs and penetrated the liver and stomach and probably the spinal cord. He would never leave that bed, nothing upon earth could save him, and his long lingering death would be a ghastly thing. It *was* the one thing I could do for him.

I put the pistol beside his right hand.

“Goodby, Becque,” I said. “In the name of France and Mary Vanbrugh I forgive the evil you tried to do to them both. Personally I feel no hate whatsoever. Goodby. Goodby, old chap.”

And I touched his hand and turned my back . . .

THE bullet cut my ear.

I sprang round and knocked the pistol from Becque's hand.

“You treacherous *devil*!” I cried.

“You poor gullible *fool*!” he answered, with the wry smile that showed the gleaming fang.

The sentry raised the door flap and looked in, and Mary Vanbrugh rushed from the *anderun* half of the tent, as I picked up my revolver.

“What is it?” she asked breathlessly.

“An accident,” replied Becque. “One of the most deplorable that ever happened . . . I shall regret it all my life . . .” and he laughed. There was no denying the gameness and stout heart of this dear Becque.

“More *Duty*, I thought, perhaps, Major de Beaujolais,” observed the girl.

“It was—as I conceived it, Miss Vanbrugh,” I replied.

After looking to Becque's bandages, giving him a sip of hot *soupe*, made with our compressed meat-tablets and a little cognac, she returned to the *anderun*, bidding me drink the *soupe*,

for Becque could do little more than taste it.

"You win again, you dog," said Becque, as soon as we were alone. "What a fool I was to aim at your head—with a shaking hand! But I did so want to see those poor brains you are so proud of. Now, will you kill me?"

"No," I answered.

"I know you won't!" he replied. "You haven't the guts . . . *And I know I shall recover . . .* Why, you fool, I breathe almost without pain. My lungs are absolutely sound. You only gave me a flesh wound and I heal splendidly. Always have done . . ."

The poor wretch evidently did not know that the bandages hid as surely mortal a wound as ever man received. His talk of fatal injuries and certain death which he had supposed to be a ruse that would gull and fool me was but the simple truth.

"I'll be on my feet in a week, you witless ape," he continued, "and, believe me, beautiful De Beaujolais, I won't miss you next time I shoot. But I hope it won't come to that. I want to see you die quite otherwise—on a stake—and then I'll deal with your Arab-debauching harlots . . ."

He coughed terribly . . .

"But I'll get you somehow! I'll get you, my Beau Sabreur! . . ."

He raised himself on one elbow, pointed a shaking hand at my face, spat—and fell back dead.

CHAPTER XVII

I FAIL MY GENERAL, MY SERVICE AND MY COUNTRY

BECQUE'S body having been borne away at dawn for burial, I soon began to wonder if the events of the previous day and night had really occurred, or whether they were the nightmare imaginings of a delirious fever-victim.

My wounds were real enough, however, and though slight, were painful in the extreme, throbbing almost unbearably and making movement a torture.

I would not have been without them, however, for three times that day Mary Vanbrugh dressed them, and though I scarcely heard her voice I felt the blessed touch of her fingers.

But she attended me as impersonally and coldly as a queen washing the feet of beggars, or as a certain type of army-surgeon doctoring a negro soldier.

As she left the tent on the last of her almost silent visits, she paused at the door-curtain and turned to me.

"What *was* that shot in the night, de Beaujolais?" she asked.

"It was Becque shooting at me," I replied. "You did not really suppose that it was I shooting at Becque, did you?"

"I simply did not know, Major de Beaujolais," answered the girl. "I should not be so foolish as to set *any* limit to what you might do in the name *duty*. Nothing whatever would surprise me in that direction, now, I think."

I SAW no one else that day, but during the night I was awakened from a fitful and nightmare-ridden doze by the Hadji Abdul Salam.

Once more he rehearsed his proposals and warnings, modified now by the elimination of Becque.

Would I, by his help, escape alone, immediately, and return with a strong French force and make him France's faithful (well-paid) vassal Emir Regent of the Great Confederation? Or—would I promise him a great bag of gold and my help in his obtaining the Regency of the Confederation if he procured the death of the Emir at the hands of Suleiman the Strong at as early a date thereafter as convenient? (He could not poison

the Emir, for that distrustful man took all precautions against such accidents.)

He fully warned me that by rejecting both his proposals I should almost certainly come to a painful and untimely end, and my two women become hareem slaves. He was in a position to state, with certainty and truth, that the Emir had decided to kill me and the Arab-Egyptian, keep the money, camels, weapons and other effects of both of us, and then accept the earlier offer of the Great Sheikh el Senussi and make an offensive and defensive alliance with him.

I heard him out, on the chance that I might glean something new, and again stated my unalterable intentions. He repeated his arguments, treats, promises, prayers and prophecies.

When he had finished, I pointed to the door and said with emphasis:

"Holy One! Depart in peace, before I commit an impiety. In other words—*go*, you villainous treacherous dog, before I shoot you."

The Hadji went, and as he crept from my tent, he ran into the arms of the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir—and I saw him no more in this life and do not expect to see him in the next.

I heard that he fell ill and died shortly after. People are apt to do so if they obstruct the ways of desert Emirs.

I lay awake till dawn, probably the most anxious, distracted, troubled man in Africa.

Mary Vanbrugh . . . France . . . My Service . . . My Uncle . . . My Duty . . . An outraged, unforgivably-insulted despot, a fierce untrammelled tyrant whose "honor" was his life—and in whose hands lay the fate of the two women for whose safety I was responsible . . .

THINGS came to a head the next night.

The Emir el Hamel el Kebir and the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir came to my tent, and, as though nothing had happened to disturb the friendliest relationship, were cordially pleasant.

Much too friendly me thought, and, knowing Arabs as I do, I could not suppress the feeling that their visit boded me no good. I grew certain of it. And I was right.

After formal courtesies and the refusal of such hospitalities as I could offer, the Emir said:

"Your Excellency has the successful accomplishment of this mission at heart?"

"It would be a fine thing for your people and pleasing to mine," I replied. "Yes, I have it much at heart."

"Your Excellency has the welfare and happiness of the Sitt Miriyam much at heart?" went on the sonorous voice.

Was there a mocking note in it? "So much so that I value it more than the treaty," I replied.

"And the other night Your Excellency called me *dog* and *swine* and *filthy black devil*, I think," was the Emir's next utterance. "Yes," he went on, as I was silent. "Yes . . . And Your Excellency has these matters much at heart . . . He admires this fair woman greatly . . . Perhaps he loves her? Possibly he would even *die for her*?"

The Vizier watched the Emir, stroked his beard and smiled.

"Your Excellency would achieve a great deed for France. But perhaps he loves France *not* so much that he would die for her? Perhaps this woman is as his faith, since he is an infidel? . . . Yes, perchance she *is* his faith?"

The two men now stared at me with enigmatic eyes, cruel, hard, and unfathomable, the unreadable alien eyes of the natives.

There was a brief silence, a contest

of wills, a dramatic silent struggle of personalities.

"Are you prepared to die for your faith?" asked the Emir, and I started as though stung. Where had I heard those words before? Who had said them?

I had. I had used those identical words to Becque himself at St. Denis, years ago!

Well, perhaps I could make a better showing than Becque had then done—as much better as my cause was nobler.

"*I am,*" I replied in the words of the dead man.

"You shall," said the Emir, as I had said to Becque; and I swear that, as he said it, the Vizier's face fell, and he smote his thigh in anger . . . Was he my friend?

"Listen," said the Emir. "These two women shall go free, in honor and safety, on the day after death has wiped out the insults you have put upon me . . . After those words, 'Dog,' 'swine,' 'black-faced devil,' I think that we may not both live. Nor would I slay with mine own hand the man who comes in peace and eats my salt. Speak Roumi . . ."

"What proof and assurance have I that you would keep your word, Emir?" I asked.

"None whatever, save that I have given it," was the reply. "It is known to all men who know me, that I have never broken faith; never failed in promise or in threat. If you die by your own hand tonight, your white women are as free as air. I, the Emir el Hamel el Kebir, swear upon the Holy Q'ran and by the Beard of the Prophet and the Sacred Names of God that I will deliver the two Sitts, in perfect safety, wheresoever they would be."

"And if I decline your kind suggestion that I should commit suicide?" I sneered in my fear, misery and rage.

"Then you can slink away in safe-

ty; *the signed treaty goes with you;* the Sitt Miriyam enters the Hareem of the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir; and the Sitt Moadi enters mine."

"You treacherous, bestial, devilish dog——" I began.

"Choose! Do not chatter."

Now my revolver was in its holster and my sword leaned against the tent-pole . . .

Let me think . . . Kind God, let me think . . .

If I could shoot both these dogs, and the sentry who would rush in, could I get the girls out of their beds and on to camels and away—I, single-handed, against the body-guard of Sudanese, whose lines were not a hundred yards away, and against the whole mob that would come running?

Such things were done in the kind of books that Maudie read, no doubt.

No. I was utterly and hopelessly in the power of these men. And what of the treaty, if it *were* possible for us to escape?

"Since you give your word *that the treaty shall be signed and loyally kept*, or, on the other hand, *that the two Sitts shall be escorted to safety*—why not do these wise and noble actions without sullyng them with murder?" I asked.

"Do you not punish those who mortally insult you?" asked the Emir.

"I fight them," I replied, and my heart gave a little bound of hope, as an idea occurred to me. "I fight them. I do not murder them. Fight me tomorrow, Emir—and if I die; let the Sitts go, taking the treaty with them."

"And if I die?" asked the Emir.

"It will be the Hand of Allah," I replied. "It will be a sign that you have done wrong. The Vizier must have orders to see that we all go in safety, bearing the treaty with us."

The Emir smiled and shook his head.

"A brave man would fight me with the conditions that the Sitts go in any

case, and take the treaty with them—and that I go if I win," said I.

"I do not fight those who come to me in peace and receive my hospitality," answered the Emir with his mocking smile.

He was but playing with me, as the cat plays with the mouse it is about to kill.

"No? You only murder them?"

"Never," replied the Emir. "But I cannot prevent their taking their own lives if they are bent upon it . . . If you die tonight, the Sitts leave here tomorrow. You know I speak the truth."

I did. I rose, and my hand went slowly and reluctantly to my holster. Life was very sweet, with Mary or success so near and dear.

I grasped the butt of the weapon, and almost drew and fired it, with one motion, into the smiling face of the Emir. But that could lead to nothing but the worst. There was no shadow of possibility of any appeal to force doing anything but harm.

I drew my revolver, and the hands of the two Arabs moved beneath their robes.

"Your pistol is unloaded," smiled the Sheikh, "but ours are not."

I opened the breech of the weapon and saw that the cartridges had been extracted.

"Get on with the murder, noble Emir—true pattern of chivalry and model of hospitality," I said, and added: "But remember, if evil befalls the Sitts, never again shall you fall asleep without my cold hand clutching you by the throat—you disgrace to the name of man, Mussulman and Arab. You defiler of the Koran and Enemy of God."

Quite good I thought it.

"If you mean that you wish to die that the Sitts may go free, and my honor may be cleansed of insult . . ." replied the Emir, and he softly clapped his hands.

A slave, who was the Emir's constant attendant, and whom he called El R'Orab, the Crow, stooped into the tent.

"Bring the cur and some water," said the Emir.

While the man was gone, I had a brilliant idea—I produced the treaty from the back of my map-case, and got sealing-wax and matches from my bag. I had not thought to use that red stick of wax in the hour of my death.

The Emir signed with my fountain-pen, and sealed with a great old ring that bore cabalistic designs and ancient Arabic lettering.

"So you sell the women, do you, noble Frenchman?" he said.

The Vizier witnessed the signature—both making a jumbled mass of Arabic scratchings which were their "marks" rather than legible signatures.

The Vizier smiled brilliantly . . .

"As I expected you would," he added to the Emir's remark.

El R'Orab, the Crow, returned, leading a pariah-dog on a string, and carrying an earthenware bowl of water.

Producing a phial from beneath his sash, the Vizier poured what looked like milk into the bowl. The slave set it before the dog, and retired from the tent. Evidently the matter had been arranged beforehand.

"You shall see what you have so wisely escaped, oh, son of courage and chivalry," said the Emir.

As such dogs invariably do, this one gulped the water greedily.

The imperturbable Arabs, chin on hand, watched. Scarcely had the dog swallowed the last of the water than it sneezed, gave a kind of choking howl, staggered and fell. In less than a minute it was dead.

I admit that it seemed to die fairly painlessly.

Again the Emir clapped his hands.

R'Orab the Crow entered, and the dog and the bowl were removed.

"Bring us tea," said the Emir; and, returning, the slave brought three steaming cups of mint tea.

Into one, the Emir poured the remainder of the contents of the phial and passed it to me.

"We would have drunk together," he said, "you drinking *that* cup—and we would have wished prosperity and happiness to the Sitts. Now cast the poison on the ground, *oh, seller of women*, and drink tea with us and to the prosperity of our alliance with France. You can hardly drink to the happiness of the women you have sold into bondage!"

And beneath the smiling eyes of the Emir and the stare of the Vizier, I cried aloud, in French:

"The treaty is signed and witnessed, and now—happiness to my Lady, and success to my country!"

And, rising to my feet, I drank the poison that should set her free, clutched at my throat—tried to shout—and choked.

I remembered Suleiman the Strong and tried to tell the Emir of his presence and his threat . . . choked . . . saw the tent, the lamp, the men whirl round me and dissolve.

And then I knew I was falling, falling, falling, through interstellar space into Eternity; and, as I did so, was aware that the two Arabs sprang to their feet.

Blind and dying, I heard a woman scream . . . Mary Vanbrugh . . .

(TO BE CONTINUED)

NOTE—At this point, and thus abruptly, ends the autobiographical contribution of Major Henri de Beaujolais to this story. Fortunately, Mr. Wren, the author of the book, was in a position to shed altogether new and revealing light upon the situation, left in such darkness by his friend the Major, and he will proceed with the story, after his own fashion, in the succeeding two issues of this magazine. And as the story thus divides itself into two clearly defined halves, readers who have missed the first half may readily begin the second in our next issue, and enjoy a story that is virtually complete in itself.



Marked Benches

By JEAN ALLISTER

COULDNT the fools see that the man was guilty?

On and on, endlessly, marking time to the monotonous ticking of the free-swinging-pendulum court clock on the opposite wall, my pencil took down the stereotyped questions and answers.

Attorneys could and did differ; cases could be and were as wide apart as the poles; but the approach and initial interrogatories were mad-dingly identical. I would welcome with unholy glee any barrister who would, calmly and quietly, ask the prisoner:

"My dear man, do you wear rubber-soled shoes?" instead of, solemnly and mysteriously:

"What is your *name*?"

And again, after quite an impressive pause.

"Yes, yes—yes—er—and how *old* are you?"

The peculiar inflection of the voice on the words "name" and "old", accompanied invariably either with the slow removal of much-beribboned spectacles or the equally slow rising on squeaky toes of the questioner, was indescribable.

And I had thought, and believed, too, that the position of court stenographer to the Assistant District Attorney of this little Tennessee town, was an honorable as well as an enviable one. What lies my hair-covered ears had heard in that dingy courtroom, and what lies my typewriter had sneeringly transcribed to reams of legal paper in the little anteroom along the hall!

There were times when I felt that

the prisoners were more afraid of the No. 2 soft lead pencil my hand wielded than of the District Attorney himself. Often have I seen them surreptitiously glance in my direction, and amusedly I recall one memorable occasion.

An old darky culprit, whites of eyes showing, had begged that I be removed from the range of his vision, excitedly gesticulating and exclaiming that the knowledge of every word passing his thick lips being recorded in this fashion, "Jus' like the Lawd's black book," made him extremely nervous.

The attorney for the defendant was beginning again:

Q. Did you, or did you not, on the night of June 4th, occupy room No. 18 at the Miller Hotel?

If he did not cease swerving back and forth on his stubby flat feet, left hand in trouser pocket, right hand dangling keys at the end of a silver chain, reminding me, for all the world, of a fat, greasy sausage sizzling in a frying-pan, I knew that no power on earth would prevent me from hurling my stenographic book into his oily, patronizing face.

Oh, I know. I was supposed to be a nerveless, more or less efficient, and assuredly much respected court machine. But I could have told them weeks ago. Nevertheless, were I even to suggest to my employer my belief regarding the very good-looking, very clever, but very guilty man that now so nonchalantly occupied the crude witness box formed by two benches at the left of the

elevated judge's desk, I knew his only comment would be:

"But reasons, my dear Miss Hunt, give me your reasons, please."

And the patient, supercilious intonation of his words would prevent me from going into further detail.

Reasons, fiddlesticks! What has a woman to do with reasons? She *knows*.

MECHANICALLY, page after page of my book was being turned and closely covered, but my subconscious mind was swearing like a drunken sailor. Several months previously I had been greatly shocked at a statement made to me in confidence by a highly thought-of maiden aunt, such statement being to the effect that, in a public trolley, of all places, in full view of its numerous passengers, the almost uncontrollable desire had come over her to throw her long thin arms about the neck of the plaster-besmeared laborer occupying the seat adjacent, just to see what would happen.

Realizing her exact sensation, I held on to the back of my swivel chair with my left hand, begging calm reason and propriety to take possession of me.

The case at bar, which, to my mind at least, had no beginning, middle or end, had dragged for weeks. The lengthy testimony covered in the direct and indirect examination could have been transposed under the caption of cross and re-cross examination, and no headway was gained. Unless the prisoner's alibi could finally be broken, there was every possibility that he would be set free.

The audience had thinned out considerably during the past ten days. Easily recognizable among the residue were a dozen or more "murder case bug" spectators, who seemed to thrive on gore. Though the connection would be most difficult to trace,

they were always associated in my mind with a childhood tale of a beast of a man who smacked his lips so contentedly, after quaffing a tall stein of warm red blood, caught as it dripped from the huge neck of a freshly killed bullock.

But the last bench, centre aisle, end seat, had always contained one who entered first and departed last.

She just sat.

Her drabness was so drab that wall, bench, floor and body blended into a nondescript whole. An old-fashioned red woolen fascinator was her only headgear. This was removed daily, displaying wispy hair of a peculiar greenish-black hue. A faded brown poncho-like cape covered the huge rawboned frame, and her skinny left hand, emerging from the torn armhole, boasted of no hoop of wedded bondage. Furthermore, I got the distinct impression that were this cloak to be removed, her right arm would appear in a sling.

For every sixty minutes in every hour—yes, for every sixty seconds in every minute—the man in the box absorbed her entire attention. Once, and once only, I had looked up to find her head turned in my direction. What eyes! In that flash, century upon century was spanned in one bound and Eve herself stood naked before me. Today her countenance alone lacked the climax-cheated expression seen on every side.

My eyes casually lifted to the ceiling above the judge's desk. The heavy rains of the past week had reopened a bad leak in the old roof, and the daily changing form of the water-soaked plaster, slowly enlarging, possessed a restful fascination for me. Today, the four long and one short wet elongations seemed to assume the shape of a huge hand.

I LOWERED my glance to the lined face of the judge, now covered with

small, shiny beads of perspiration. From many years of keen observation, I had secretly made the following infallible deduction:

The more annoyed and weary this able old man became as the case progressed, the more erect he sat, the more often his mahogany gavel rapped forth the order for silence, and the more judgelike and official were his every word and act.

But, when he leisurely leaned back, the picture of well-earned comfort, long-fingered hands folded over black-gowned, rotund waistline, eyes sleepily closed, the danger signals were all in full view and the track cleared for action.

I had seen him actually yawn three seconds before giving a finding to the jury that resulted in a man being sent to prison for the term of his natural life. And to all appearances, he had not even been listening!

This particular morning, his honor had interrupted innumerable times to ask questions concerning the various cases cited as precedents; and the little scrap pad at his elbow had had many sheets determinedly torn from it.

Some of these notes had been crumpled and thrown into the steel basket at the side of his desk. One small wad rolled in my direction. Endeavoring not to lose a word, my eye caught its resting place and my foot quickly covered it. Later, stooping to recover my intentionally dropped handkerchief, I held both in my lap out of sight and tried to smooth out the much-creased three-by-six-inch bit of paper.

Perhaps this would give some indication of his mental attitude. It was with the greatest impatience I waited for the slight pause that would necessarily ensue when the other side took up the cross-examination. So far, the signs were all against me.

The judge had never seemed more interested.

The opportunity came at last. The blood rushed to my face as I glanced at the telltale slip. More than half was covered with shaded Spencerian penmanship ovals, such as had been the bane of my existence as a youngster. Then followed an uncertain line of male or female profiles. But across the bottom was the most beautifully formed, most decidedly written "DAMN" I had ever seen!

Gazing amazedly at the judge, at that moment the personification of amassed experience and learning, I recognized a kindred spirit. Apparently I was not the only court machine in that room.

THE benches for the jurymen were situated at the far end of the L-shaped platform facing the judge. My desk was sandwiched in between the jury and the witness box, allowing me an unobstructed view of both.

A whispered "I have it, John," from the little jurymen in the bench nearest, next drew my attention. "Gosh, it took me all morning to work it out, but I've got it. Look!"

Thinking that this truly intelligent-looking individual, whose head sat between his shoulders like an eagle's, had discovered an important angle bearing on the trial, I strained my eyes and ears.

He appeared to be displaying something to the uncouth blond giant at his side, which he was most careful to conceal in the cupped palm of his hand. The look of admiration that spread over the freckled countenance of the tall man whetted my curiosity to an alarming degree. Fascinated, I endeavored to watch their every move. The little man was about to replace the object in his coat pocket when I caught a gleam of light. In my surprise, my pencil almost lost a phrase.

This picked juryman had labored the entire morning and finally succeeded in getting "all the pigs in clover" in one of those pocket mirrors, round-shaped, stupid advertising puzzles.

At least four witnesses, during that time, had testified that they had seen the prisoner stealthily emerging from the servants' exit of the Miller Hotel on the night the dead mountaineer's body had been discovered in room 18.

True, their testimony had been overruled and stricken from the records, since the defense had been able to prove, to the full satisfaction of the court, that their past could bear little scrutiny and their reputation for honesty, less.

Regardless of the queer twists of the law, regardless of records, and regardless of reputations, I knew, for once in their sordid lives, they had spoken facts. I recalled how one had expostulated in the beautifully drawling voice of the hills:

"But see heah, see heah, strangers, I reckon you-all don' understan'. I suah can't see what my doings," he had tapped his broad chest, "has to do with *that one*," pointing straight at the prisoner, "comin' out of the back door close on to three that night." "An' I want to tell you-all . . ."

But to no purpose! With sullen face and contempt for the white-collared occupants of the room plainly visible in his cold blue eyes, he now stood with his companions against the rear wall, his massive tanned neck rising out of the open-throated soiled shirt like a copper column.

The dead man had lived in the hills alone. There was neither kith nor kin present, no weepy wife with whimpering babe in arms, sometimes borrowed for the occasion, to work upon the sympathies of the jury. From a cold-blooded, sensible, good

citizenship standpoint, the county could very well spare the deceased and others like him.

The noon hour of twelve was striking.

This ancient oak clock was one of the court's heirlooms. Long ago, in token of gratitude for a case won, a German clockmaker, so the story ran, had presented it to the then presiding judge. To overcome the perfectly feasible objection that the striking of each hour would disturb the court, this ingenious man had so altered the mechanism that only the noon hour of twelve and the closing hour of four sounded daily throughout the low-ceilinged room and adjoining hallways.

Furthermore, but unfortunately long before my time, a daredevil witness, proving literally his exactness of aim, had pierced the swinging pendulum with a bullet so neatly that hardly a tick was lost. The flattened lead could still be seen embedded in the large brass disc.

AFTER luncheon of too many cups of too strong tea, I was seated at my desk in the anteroom, reading over the notes of the previous hours.

The prisoner's replies possessed one oddity. When his own attorney questioned him, no hesitancy whatever was apparent as to their affirmative or negative quality. But when the State had charge, the space in my stenographic notes showed plainly a marked pause ere any decided reply would be given even to similar questions, as if confirmation had to be sought in some direction before a statement of any kind could be made.

Instantly, there flashed across my mind the time-worn stage trick of the blindfolded plump lady and her aggressive black-haired confederate, who used to roam at will throughout the audience, holding up watches and coins for her to glibly rattle off the

dates or numbers. I dismissed this as childish and stupid and became irritated at my lack of concentration.

The consensus of opinion was that the case would reach the jury in the morning. The prisoner's cronies had evidently planned a great reception for the morrow. Some of the latter, together with several witnesses, were at that moment occupying the waiting benches in my little room or standing in small groups, all discussing the probable outcome of the case at bar.

A politician-appearing individual, of more than the average height and girth, was leaning against the frame of the door opening on the hallway and talking to a short, ruddy-faced companion, who had not deemed the trial of sufficient importance to warrant the removal of his blue overalls. This tall man would breathe carefully upon his spectacles and then wipe them still more carefully with a green-bordered silk "show" handkerchief, repeating in a monotonous tone between each operation:

"I tell you, Bill, it's a darn shame," holding one glass up to the light and peering through it, "that a man like John should have been held so long . . . a darn shame."

"Yes, but it's all right now, it's all right," the overalled one assured the big fellow in a high staccato voice. Then, sidling up to him, finger on nose, he confidentially added: "Got three cases from back of the ridge; yes, sir, three. Real stuff, too, rear of Mike's." Then, with a hearty chuckle, he continued: "That'll help him forget some, won't it—eh?"

The swish of mud-caked dragging skirts, as the drab one passed the open door on her way to the courtroom, cut short his laughter. With a nudge and meaning jerk of thumb, but in a much lowered voice, he then said:

"McCloud, you know, the dead one,

used to bring her to my place for a drink on pay nights. That's . . ."

Could I have heard aright?

"That's his woman."

His woman! Had it not been for her eyes, it would have been hard to believe that Romance had assumed this form when she had stepped over the sill of the murdered man's shack in the hills.

JUST then the steady, flat-footed, but unmistakable tread of the prisoner's attorney sounded along the hallway. My dislike for this practitioner of law had absolutely no sane reason for its basis. No doubt he fully believed his client innocent.

Probably it was the knowledge that the county was rather proud of this "slick one who had never lost a case," coupled with the further fact that he never spoke a word too much, never wasted a gesture, splendidly timed his very entrances and exits so that no ray of the limelight could possibly touch a fellow-man, that exasperated me.

He was so sure of himself, and he would prove a bad loser.

With measured step, lifted hat and lipless smile, he approached, glanced in and passed my doorway. The majority of the men on the benches in the room were his own witnesses. A few minutes before they had been humans, each filled with his own importance and each also under the prevailing impression that a stenographer is both deaf and blind.

At that moment I had more respect for the solid, penknife-initialed oak benches than for their now-awed and silent occupants. And the amazing thing was, instead of the diversified countenances registering resentment at thus being completely ignored they actually appeared to like it. Such was the dominating power of this attorney.

Nervously they commenced to file out.

Half-heartedly I gathered together notebooks and copy. The seat nearest the door still held a man, the copper-necked, reputationless friend of the dead mountaineer. Viciously, I snapped out:

"This time, I hope he loses!"

Realizing that under no circumstances was I ever to discuss any case with witnesses or bystanders, I primly resumed my task, hoping he would leave the room.

Presently he rose to his full height, and with a single stride reached my desk. Eye met eye; then he smiled a queer, twisted smile, seemed about to speak, thought better of it, and calmly joined the mob now scurrying by the door to the courtroom. Though the prisoner at the bar would probably be set free and royally entertained on the morrow, the penetrating look of this mountaineer had plainly telegraphed the surety that his freedom would be short-lived.

It lacked but a quarter to the hour set for the afternoon session. Hastily, I began putting points on a half-dozen or more pencils by means of the sharpener fastened to the letterpress. At the same time, to relieve the tension, I chattered foolishly to the coal-black official county court cat that shared my luncheon each noon. "Satan, Junior," I had christened him, and he proudly wore the accumulated brilliantly hued candy box ribbons donated by the various female clerks in the building.

Notebooks under one arm and pencils in the roomy pocket of my black sateen apron, I was about to enter the hallway when the words "Oh, my God, look at that! Did you see that! Right across my path, too. Oh, God!" spoken in the most abject fear, caused me to turn so quickly that I collided with the

white-haired court attendant then approaching.

His usual station was behind the judge's desk, and he was at the moment accompanying the prisoner, face now drained of all color, to the courtroom. Apologizing, I reentered my room and fumbled with the pigeon-hole files.

They had halted a step or two down the hall. I was not eavesdropping. Anyone passing was at liberty to hear the prisoner laughingly reassuring the aged attendant.

"Of course, you know, I have not an ounce of superstition in my whole make-up, but when you're suddenly slammed up against the old black cat hoodoo—well, it's not any too comforting."

Then followed an elaboration on the part of the attendant concerning the odd and varied superstitions of former prisoners, his hearty laugh punctuating each case. Suddenly a decidedly serious tone seemed to enter into his speech and a lengthy mumbling conversation ensued, of which only a word here and there reached my ears.

Presently, however, in a clear and decisive voice, the attendant said:

"But let me tell you, man, and you can believe it or not, as you please"—his voice rose still higher at this point—"no one who ever stuck his feet in those grooves"—a pause—"or covered those marks with his fingers, was ever found guilty. No, sir! Nary one! And I have been here over thirty years. So . . ."—I heard a loud slap on the back—"if you want to try out the old yarn, find your footing, my boy, as it were, and get your grip on that bench. See?"

The prisoner's reply failed to reach me as their footsteps became fainter and fainter. During the lengthy trial these two had become quite friendly. Puzzled, I kept repeating to myself:

What marks? What footing?
What bench?

WHILE it would be utterly ridiculous for me to make the statement that all guilty persons were more or less superstitious, the fact remained that during the years I had sat in the courtroom at the end of the hall, taking down testimony after testimony, the majority of the culprits *had* fingered some amulet or prayed to some god or other than their Heavenly Father, but I had never heard of the odd superstition as set forth by the aged attendant.

The order for silence had already been given when I entered the courtroom and took my customary seat. This new superstitious tangent of marked benches had so occupied my subconscious thoughts, that the State's attorney had proceeded some distance on the cross-examination before I remembered my decision to endeavor to solve the cause of the persistent pause in the prisoner's replies to his interrogatories.

Q. "Is it not a fact that you and the dead man had been on unfriendly terms for years?"

It was just a flash, but I caught it. The corner of the prisoner's eye sought the face of his own attorney and then lowered to the pudgy hand that continuously fingered the silver key chain. At that moment, the "slick one's" index finger and thumb held a small, pearl-handled knife distinctly away from the remaining keys. Clearly and decisively came the answer:

"No, sir."

Again:

Q. "Since the time he had been discharged from your factory for drunkenness, had he not made several threats to take your life?"

This time I would make sure. A large brass door key was being nonchalantly waved back and forth.

A. "I do not know."

Q. "On the night of June 4th, did you not have an appointment to meet the deceased at the Miller Hotel?"

Again the penknife.

A. "No, sir."

Imagination? Perhaps. I took advantage of the only prerogative permitted a court stenographer and turned toward my employer. Apologetically, I ventured:

"I am having a little difficulty in catching the endings of the responses, due to the rattling of the keys held by the prisoner's attorney." With my most ladylike smile, I looked at the latter and added, "If he will kindly . . ."

"Surely, surely," came the ready answer, as his pocket received the keys.

"Was it also imagination that caused his thick neck to turn scarlet where it bulged over his immaculate tight collar, as, back toward me, he fumbled among the documents in his case?"

Persistently, the same points were covered again and again.

During the entire afternoon session, in direct contrast to his former sitting posture, the prisoner had stood erect at the farther end of the witness box. If the opinions heard on every side were any criterion, I was alone in my belief.

The State reverted to the first material query in the initial direct examination.

Q. "Did you, or did you not, on the night of June 4th, occupy room No. 18 at the Miller Hotel?"

A. "I did not."

Shortly thereafter I was requested to read back the dozen or more preceding questions. Deliberately, and with malice aforethought, upon reaching the above, I gave the answer in a clear voice as—"I did."

"Not!" almost yelled back the "slick one."

"Not," I dutifully repeated and continued.

But I had seen the prisoner's head jerk back as if he had received a blow.

AT the closing hour, the alibi still held. The usual summing up would probably take place in the morning and the case turned over to the jury in the afternoon.

The courtroom quickly emptied. The colored janitor shuffled in and, with his long-handled brush, began clearing out the innumerable paper pellets, burnt matches and pencil stubs that daily littered the floor between the benches.

On the raised platform, with the aid of a high stool, an assistant was busily removing the accumulated dust of months from the large frosted incandescent globes, three of which, points downward, fitted into each arm of the remodeled gas fixture overhead. These Prussian-helmet-shaped electric bulbs were the one sore spot in this young darky's existence. He swore that the air spikes were as sharp as fish knives.

In the narrow hallway the last straggler and I rubbed elbows. Feeling a great pity for this middle-aged, angular woman, with the eyes and mouth of eternal youth and vitality, I turned and smiled.

"Ugh!" Her tone and disgust left nothing to be desired.

Then her left hand literally pushed me from her path.

Years ago, with a similar gesture, she must have brushed aside conventions and laws and proudly secured for herself the title of "his woman." And now he was dead. Her face expressed nothing, but even the ungainly mud-covered cloak could not hide the purpose and determination of that broad back.

Entering my little room, I was about to accept the conviction that I had sent my mind on a wild goose chase as far as this particular prisoner was concerned, when the chance remark of the court attendant recurred to me.

"So, find your footing, my boy, and get your grip on that bench."

What bench?

The "Goodnight, miss," of the janitor and his assistant as they passed the door interrupted my puzzled thoughts. Securing a tiny pocket flashlight from my desk drawer, I slowly proceeded toward the empty courtroom. How could I possibly have thought it small? In the fast falling darkness, the walls seemed miles distant.

Nervously, I walked up one aisle and down the other, methodically throwing the small ray on each and every bench, but with no result. Before the opening of the fall term they had all been revarnished and were still disgustingly free from any markings save a few scattered pencil triangles and circles.

I then ascended the two low steps leading to the elevated platform and stood behind the judge's desk. Faintly I could make out the jury benches in the far corner, then my desk and finally the witness box a bare yard or so distant.

Suddenly I felt a curious inner tug to "stand on trial" as it were. And for the first time in my life, I timidly entered that crude enclosure from whence so many had either swung freely out toward the front entrance, or, with lagging steps, had accompanied an escort of officers to the rear.

The darkness was playing tricks. I actually felt guilty. Guilty of what? The trembling ray began to pick out shapes in the long visitors' benches that lined the rear wall.

Surely those little, half-mittened

white hands, daintily holding tiny fans before unseen faces, and the faint rustle of heavy silks, coupled with the lace-cuffed, darker masculine fingers that here and there were carefully taking snuff from small caskets and lifting it to unseen nostrils, were all creations of my overwrought brain.

I must get out. Ghosts with no faces were unusual, and fear at last overpowered me. I could not run. Moving my feet noiselessly across the floor, at the same time stealthily sliding my hand along the bench rail in front, I had almost reached the end of the box when my heart lost several beats and the light dropped with a thud.

Four fingers and thumb of my left hand had found grooves as if made for them. Simultaneously both feet seemed to have become planted into similar indentations. Instantly there flashed through my mind again the attendant's queer remark:

"So, find your footing, my boy, and get your grip on that bench!"

The box was merely two of the court benches placed one in front of the other and securely fastened to the floor. With shaky hand I picked up the light and held it close. Involuntarily I exclaimed:

"Good Lord!"

This was not profanity. How many hands and how many feet and how many years had it taken to wear the floor and bench in this almost imperceptible fashion. The depressions were felt rather than seen.

A slight tearing sound caused me to focus the ray above the witness box. In the flickering light, the plaster-soaked stain resembling a hand assumed the proportions of a huge hideous claw, the palm of which held the three shiny bulbs. The low ceiling appeared to sag with the wet weight, and in my nervous condition I imagined that the large centre

globe directly over my head was wobbling in a most menacing fashion. Frightened, I turned and fled.

NEXT morning I was first to reach the courtroom. "His woman," the second. The steady rain threatened to keep up for hours. Lights were being lit in the narrow hallways.

The stage was all set, benches full, attorneys ready, jurymen in their usual places, attendants at attention and the judge about to sit in his chair. My eyes never left the door through which the prisoner would appear any moment.

"Looking very dapper in a new dark gray suit, a confident smile just visible on his finely moulded full lips, he stepped into the witness box. With steady foot and sure hand, he proceeded immediately to the farther end and gripped the front rail. I watched every move. Oh, no. Not an ounce of superstition in his whole makeup!

Both sides decided to let the case rest on the testimony as taken. The prisoner would have no occasion to "hang himself," since he was done forever with the necessity of answering: "No, sir" and "Yes, sir," "I don't know," and "I did" or "I didn't."

The summing-up of the State was quick and to the point. The pleading of the "slick one" a masterpiece in rhetoric, and he carried his audience with him to the last period. The learned judge also had his say. If the prisoner heard a word, he made no sign. As for me, I could think of nothing but the attendant's warning:

"So, find your footing, my boy, and get your grip on that bench!"

The bewildered look on the faces of the twelve picked men at the close of the finding of the judge had changed to one of relief as they Indian-filed toward the jury room on the judge's right.

The court clock boomed out the

noon hour, but no one stirred. To me, instead of strokes, the dozen sounds exactly paralleled the "nnn—nnn—nnn" made by an impudent child sticking out his tongue in glee.

Ten minutes passed. Then three more. The lowering skies made the light above the platform almost a necessity.

The brass knob on the door of the jury-room was slowly turning. All eyes, as if manipulated by an unseen crank, pivoted in that direction. The judge's hand was already in position to remove the gown of office. The prisoner's attorney, hat in one hand and his carefully strapped gold monogrammed brief case in the other, stood ready to receive the storm of congratulations that must of necessity follow.

The door opened. More than half the spectators rose to their feet. The diminutive "pigs-in-clover" puzzle man had been chosen as foreman! Puffily he stood before us licking his lips, fully cognizant of his own importance and the importance of the duty he was about to perform.

"After due deliberation, we find the prisoner . . ."

The word "not" was actually forming on the little man's lips when the first shot ripped the silence of the courtroom. A jagged white scar appeared in the newly varnished bench rail a few inches from the prisoner's hand. Then a shrill cry was heard, followed by the words:

"I will! I will! Let go, damn you, let go!"

The shattered green glass of the judge's desk lamp proved where the diverted second shot had found resting place.

Instantly I was back in a circus, the odor of wet sawdust rising to my dilated nostrils. Three rings! Some

one cracking a whip! And I, fearful of missing a single trick, trying to look everywhere at once.

Again the cry:

"No! You won't stop me. No!"

His woman! The muddy cloak was off her bony shoulders at last. Her long, greenish hair, loosened in the struggle, had become entangled in the soiled shirt of the copper-necked mountaineer, who was trying desperately to wrench the rusty weapon from her clenched right hand.

He succeeded just as the third and final shot hit the low ceiling directly above the prisoner's head.

A cry of horror escaped me. The fingers of the clammy-clawlike hand seemed to close once and then open. Several feet of rain-soaked plaster thundered dustily down, striking the shaky electric fixture and carrying with it the insecurely fastened center globe—a sharp and shiny missile that dropped like a plummet.

IN the confusion that followed three things stand out in my mind distinctly.

The puzzle pocket mirror, evidently dropped by the little jurymen in the excitement, trying to catch the light at the foot of the judge's desk; the maniacal peel of laughter that had issued from the almost toothless mouth of the huddled drab heap that was "his woman"; and the look of utter unbelief still apparent in the glassy eyes of the prisoner, who had gone to meet his Maker with feet firmly planted in the grooves, right hand gripping the marked bench, the way having been lighted for him by the spike of one of the large Prussian-helmet-shaped globes which the disgruntled assistant had claimed was as sharp as a fish knife.

By The Candle Flame

By R. F. FOSTER

FOR a week the pneumonia had run its course, and David Pinner was dying. In the low-ceilinged room his wife and only son, Maurice, hovered anxiously in the background, while Doctor Magnus, hypodermic syringe in hand, bent over the bed. Presently he straightened himself and glanced across at Mrs. Pinner.

"You'd better go and lie down for a bit," he said softly. "I'll send Maurice to you if——"

Mrs. Pinner raised a tiny handkerchief to her lips and gave a dry sob. Then, with a quick glance at her husband, battling for breath upon the bed, she turned and went hesitatingly to the door. The doctor watched her go and wondered. Did she really mind? It was a shock, of course, and he understood that David Pinner's affairs were not in order. In his delirium Pinner had revealed many secrets.

"Hand over that gas cylinder, Maurice," he said, rousing himself from his cynical reflections. "I'll inject some more brandy. Nothing like brandy! Then we'll try the oxygen."

He took the cylinder from the shaking hands of the young man and adjusted the nozzle. Then, dipping his syringe into a glass of brandy, he bared the sick man's arm and jabbed in the needle. Maurice turned his head away, and the doctor, the injection given, looked at him appraisingly.

"Better have a drop of brandy yourself," he suggested in a kindly voice, and straightway poured out a peg and handed it to his companion. Maurice coughed as he drank the raw spirit, and there was more color in his face when he put the glass on the table.

"Now if you'll stand at the head of the bed, I'll get you to hold the nozzle," Doctor Magnus went on, turning the tap of the cylinder.

A faint hissing sounded as the oxygen escaped. Maurice went to the head of the bed.

"Hold it like this over the nose and mouth," the doctor continued. "Not too close. That's it. Better rest your arm against the bedrail or you'll feel the strain in a minute."

Maurice did as he was bidden. His father was breathing stertorously, and every now and then he groaned. The young man noticed the pulse in the neck and watched it, fascinated. When that stopped his father would be dead.

Doctor Magnus's voice broke into his thoughts.

"Now, listen, Maurice," the older man was saying. "This is the last chance. You understand that, don't you? If the heart's strong enough—and it isn't weak, by any means—he'll pull through. If not——"

He ended expressively, and Maurice clenched his teeth. If "the governor" died!

He found he had shifted the nozzle

a little, so that it touched his father's nose. As though he had committed a sin he raised it fearfully and glanced at Doctor Magnus. The doctor adjusted his stethoscope, sounded his patient and then straightened himself. His face was very grave, as Maurice noticed with a pang.

"I'd—I'd better call mother, hadn't I?" he asked tremulously.

"No, wait. I want to ask you something."

Maurice showed his surprise.

"If—if your father dies, Maurice," said Doctor Magnus, "may I try an experiment?"

Maurice shuddered, so that the nozzle he held struck his father's nose again.

"Careful, old man!" the doctor warned him. "There's nothing to be frightened about. You've heard of heart massage, haven't you? There've been two cases in France recently where doctors succeeded in reviving dead people."

Maurice nodded quickly. "You want to try that?" he whispered.

"With your permission, yes. The two experiments I quoted didn't really succeed, for the patients died again just afterwards, but I believe I can do it." He pointed to his bag which lay on the table. "I've got apparatus—just finished making it. Shall I try?"

A feeling of unreality was upon the young man. He could only stare at the pulse in his father's neck. The thought came to him that if a spirit left a body it would be impossible to call it back.

"Shall I?" the doctor persisted.

Maurice was suddenly aware that the neck pulse had stopped.

"My God!" he ejaculated. He looked at the doctor desperately. "Yes, yes, anything," he exclaimed and then fell on his knees by the bed.

IT was getting very dark, and a low rumble of thunder sounded ominously. The doctor, who was bending over the still form on the bed, straightened himself and touched the heaving shoulders of the young man.

"Come Maurice," he whispered. "There's no time to lose." He looked about him anxiously. "Is there a wall-plug?"

Maurice rose to his feet. His face was very pale, and when he saw the open bag on the table a look of fear came into his eyes.

"You're going to do it?" he exclaimed.

But Doctor Magnus did not reply. He had found a wall-plug, and it was now connected by a wire to the bag. Maurice watched him approach the bed, and then, a feeling of sickness almost overcoming him, he turned away. It was a terrible thing the doctor was doing, and Maurice wondered. Had anyone a right to raise a man from the dead?

He walked unsteadily to the window and gazed out over the darkening landscape. Everything was very still, a hush of expectancy was upon the garden and the copse across the road. The sky was overcast, and lightning flickered in the east.

Suddenly lightning stabbed the copse, and Maurice, startled, stepped back. A crash of thunder followed with appalling swiftness, a pattering of rain sounded; then the heavens seemed to open. It grew rapidly darker, the wind rose and whined in the chimney and set the trees in the copse dancing madly. In the uncanny din Maurice was like a cork, tossed upon the waters. He began to pray.

Above the tumult of the storm the voice of Doctor Magnus sounded harshly.

"The light! Switch on the light, you young idiot!"

Maurice opened his eyes and gazed

wildly at the doctor and then at the still form on the bed.

"Stop!" he cried. "It's wrong, you mustn't do it."

A sneer appeared on the doctor's face as he glanced up from his work. Then, as though realizing what was in the boy's mind, the sneer gave place to a look of compassion.

"Don't worry, Maurice," he said gently. "Go switch on the light. I can't see."

Maurice had seen the sneer, for as the doctor had looked up a flash of lightning had outlined him in blue. To Maurice he had looked devilish.

The young man stumbled across the room to the switch. Suddenly he tripped and fell headlong. There was a crackling sound, and the doctor let out a fierce oath.

"You accursed fool!" he almost shouted. "You've ruined everything."

Maurice realized with a shock of dismay he had tripped over the wire connecting the doctor's apparatus with the wall-plug, and that he had short-circuited the current. Helplessly he stood while the doctor bent over the body on the bed. Then, his wits returning, he went cautiously to the light switch and pressed it down. Nothing happened.

The doctor was working furiously, but he threw out an order to the boy.

"Get a candle," he commanded. "You've short-circuited the whole system by your infernal clumsiness."

Without a word Maurice crossed the room and opened the washstand drawer. For a moment he fumbled amongst its contents, and then, taking out a candle, he struck a match and lit it. The feeble light flickered madly in the draught.

"Bring it here," ordered the doctor.

Maurice walked to the head of the bed. Suddenly he stopped and ut-

tered an exclamation. Then, excitement taking possession of him, he bent forward, and the hot grease from the candle fell upon the face of the form on the bed.

"Look!" he cried hysterically. "The pulse!" He pointed to his father's neck. "It's going again!"

DAVID PINNER'S convalescence was a slow one, for he seemed to have little desire for life. When his wife tried to rally him he would shrink from her, so that she was often in tears, and she wondered fearfully whether he knew what her feelings had been when she had waited to be summoned to bid him a last farewell.

She recalled that scene vividly now. She had not expected him to recover, and as she lay on the sofa in the drawing-room, her thoughts had gone to the funeral, to the clothes she would wear, to her subsequent life. She remembered how Maurice had burst into the room telling her that his father had died but that Doctor Magnus had raised him from the dead. He must have been dead nearly ten minutes, Maurice had said.

What happened in those ten minutes? Was there such a thing as a spirit or a soul, or whatever it was that wasn't supposed to die? Had David's spirit known her thoughts?

It was the only way she could account for his apparent dislike of her, and for the little desire he had to return to full health.

But David Pinner was strange to everyone, and the only person who could bring a smile to his face was Doctor Magnus. Even Maurice, for all the love he had for his father, could not gain any sign of affection from him.

Gradually he came to realize that it was not merely affection that was lacking. It was recognition. David

Pinner didn't seem to recognize his wife or his son, and once, to Maurice's consternation, when his business partner came down to visit the convalescent and spoke of the past, David Pinner had frowned and asked what Hargreaves was talking about.

"He's lost his memory temporarily," said Doctor Magnus. "It'll come back again all right." But he, too, was frankly puzzled.

As day followed day and David Pinner grew gradually stronger, it became evident that far from regaining his memory he was getting worse. In the beginning, there were certain sentences of his which suggested a vague remembrance of the past, but by the time he was able to sit out of bed even that fleeting memory went.

It was the nurse who discovered he did not even recognize his own name. As she was helping him out of bed one afternoon she addressed him as "Mr. Pinner," and when he had sat down he suddenly put a hand on her arm.

"Tell me, nurse," he said, "why do you call me 'Mr. Pinner?'"

The nurse was startled; then she remembered his trouble.

"That's your name," she answered gently. "Don't you remember?"

He shook his head. "And is my Christian name David?" he asked. "That—that other woman calls me that."

The poor nurse was terribly upset, but she answered bravely.

"That is your wife," she said in a voice that trembled in spite of herself. "Yes, you are David Pinner."

"And the boy—Maurice, isn't he called?"

"Your son," the nurse faltered.

The situation was a dreadful one, and Mrs. Pinner, when she was told of the conversation between her husband and the nurse, implored Doctor Magnus to have a consultation with

a brain specialist. But Magnus was unwilling to do that at present, for he had not yet published the fact that he had brought David Pinner back to life.

"You see," he told Mrs. Pinner and Maurice, whom he pledged to secrecy for the time being, "my apparatus isn't perfect yet. It was Maurice who really revived Mr. Pinner, when he tripped over the wire. That short-circuit, but there, you wouldn't understand that probably."

It was the intention of Doctor Magnus to reveal what had happened, at a scientific gathering in London a few months later, when he would have perfected his apparatus. To consult a brain specialist about David would be to divulge his secret prematurely.

The person who felt David's change most was Maurice. In the old days Maurice had often sneered secretly at his father's lack of culture and his unpolished speech, for David had prided himself upon being a "self-made" man, and although he decided that Maurice should be "well educated" and a "gentleman," he himself was content that he should remain as he had always been.

But the new David Pinner spoke in a cultured voice, and he used words and phrases which in the old days he had not even known the meaning of. He would sit gazing out of the window, a dreamy look in his eyes such as would have been impossible before his illness, and the infrequent sound of the piano in the drawing-room below—for Maurice was the only musician in the household and a poor one at that—would inspire him to unwonted animation.

Yes, David was changed utterly, and Maurice found this new man not nearly so lovable as the uncouth father he had known before.

IT WAS two months since David had been raised from the dead, and the long period of convalescence was over. But David's memory had not returned, and upon Mrs. Pinner's suggestion Hargreaves had broached the question of buying out David from the partnership. The business worry that had been on David's mind when he was ill had been dealt with successfully by Hargreaves. The firm was in a flourishing condition, and if David were to retire he would be able to live as comfortably as heretofore.

David had been indifferent, indeed he had appeared not to understand what Hargreaves was driving at, and it was eventually decided to let the question rest for a month, after which time, if Doctor Magnus's promised consultation with a brain specialist resulted in no cure for David, Hargreaves was to act.

Summer was on the wane. For several days now David had been well enough to leave the house on short walks with his son, but Maurice, though he had tried hard, had been unable to interest him in local beauty spots, in the garden or the car. It was as though David were in a trance.

Then the climax came. It had been a day of great heat, and a storm was brewing in the west. Great banks of clouds darkened the sunset, and now and then a gust of wind would temper the oppressive heat and send the sere leaves scurrying from the trees in the copse.

David Pinner had been stranger than ever during the day. He had kept away from his wife and Maurice, had wandered aimlessly about the house, picking up ornaments and examining them, staring at pictures, gazing out of the windows at the peaceful scene, and seeming to be totally unaware of realities. His conduct made his wife almost hysterical, while Maurice watched him fearfully.

Dr. Magnus paid a visit just before dinner, but David would not see him. Mrs. Pinner told the doctor that her husband seemed to be getting worse and begged that the brain specialist be consulted without delay.

"Wait a week more," Magnus temporized. "I only——"

"Look here, doctor!" exclaimed Maurice suddenly. "What is the governor's trouble?"

"Just a little lapse of memory," said Magnus vaguely. "Just a lapse. Nothing to worry about, you know."

"Yes, but, Doctor, do you believe in the existence of the soul?"

"Good heavens, Maurice! What's that got to do with it? As a matter of fact, I don't, or at least, if you mean the existence of an indestructible part of each of us, I don't. But why?"

"Have you noticed that 'the governor's' not only lost his memory, but that he's changed. He speaks differently; he seems to have different thoughts; he walks differently. Why, his very face has changed; it's different altogether."

"Well? What mad idea have you got hold of now?"

"Doctor," said Maurice, leaning forward impressively, "when you brought him back to life, d'you think you could have brought back the wrong soul?"

For a moment Doctor Magnus drummed his fingers on his knees.

"Rubbish!" he said decisively. "It's impossible, and Maurice," he added in a different voice, "if you go on thinking along those lines you'll end up in a mad-house."

He turned towards Mrs. Pinner and was holding out his hand when he paused. A look of fear was in her face, and she appeared to be on the verge of hysteria.

"Listen!" she exclaimed in a tense voice.

Then both the doctor and Maurice

heard it. Above the rising wind came a tiny thread of music, and as they listened it gained in volume.

"The piano!" exclaimed Maurice.

"But who's playing?" asked the doctor. "Perhaps someone's come while we've been talking, a visitor, waiting to see you."

The music suddenly stopped. Maurice, white-faced and shaking, suddenly moved across the room.

"I'm going to investigate," he announced from the doorway.

Doctor Magnus hesitated a moment and then followed the young man. Mrs. Pinner, with handkerchief pressed against her quivering lips, hurried after him.

The drawing-room was at the end of the hall. It was getting very dark now, and the place was unlighted. Suddenly a single note was struck on the piano, and there followed a mad riot of sound, the noise of storm and tempest, a song of strife played by a master musician.

The drawing-room was open. Maurice paused and then looked inside. As the others came up, he stepped back and swung round, his face a pale smudge in the gloom, and his eyes glowing with fear.

"It's the—the governor!" he stut-tered.

"Nonsense! He can't play a note. This is an artist."

He stepped into the room, and as he did so the music ceased.

THE storm had come. David Pinner stood at the window and gazed out over the wind-swept countryside. His eyes were alive with excitement, and he was conscious of an unusual feeling of restlessness. He had not seen the others at the door when he was playing, and now they had gone back to the morning room.

"I must go out," he said aloud, and opened the French windows.

The gale tore at the curtains and

almost buffeted him back into the room, but he gave a gasping laugh of joy and stepped outside into the driving rain. For a few seconds he stood still, drinking in the wet air greedily, then, closing the window and glancing hastily round, he strode across the lawn to the gate. Out in the road he paused; a frown came over his face, and he muttered beneath his breath, "I don't know this place. It must be north."

He made up his mind and set off up the road, walking swiftly. Presently he broke into a run, and then, breathless, dropped down to a walk again. For an hour he kept on. The storm abated, the rain stopped, and the last rays of the sun threw long shadows.

The country became hilly, but David did not slacken speed. The sun had now set and the light was falling, yet he still kept on, as though he had some definite purpose in his journey. Then suddenly he stopped, and in the half-light looked about him. His glance rested on a church spire over the brow of a hill.

"Not far now," he murmured, and continued on his way.

As he breasted the next hill he suddenly broke into song. A Rhenish love song it was he sang, and the words were German. At the top of the hill he broke off and uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Not far now," he told himself again, and broke into a run once more.

He stumbled once, going down the hill, but he picked himself up and went on his way happily, now walking, now running, now singing, now silent.

At last he slackened speed. It was quite dark, and the sky was studded with great stars. David went cautiously along the road and then turned into a big gateway. Without hesitation he went up the drive, but he was silent now and his pace was slower.

A dog barked somewhere near at hand. David stopped.

"Hullo, Jimmy!" he called out, and a moment later the dog, still barking furiously, leaped a fence.

"Hullo, old Jimmy!" called David again, and stretched out a hand.

The dog's bark changed to a whimper of joy, but he halted uncertainly. As David went towards him, speaking softly, his tail began to wag, and then he leaped forward and fawned upon the man.

"Poor old Jimmy!" murmured David. "You're old. You oughtn't to be left outside at night."

He seemed to remember something, for he straightened himself and with a gesture and a word sent the dog back. The animal slunk away in the darkness, then stopped and, turning round, followed the man at a little distance.

David had continued his walk, though now his gait was slower. Presently a light appeared among the trees, and he could see the dim outline of a house.

As though he knew the way he left the drive and took a path through the wood. He came to a lawn and went unhesitatingly up the stone steps that led onto a terrace. Then he paused and looked in at a lighted window.

Inside on a couch sat a woman reading. David raised his arms toward her in a gesture of yearning; he was about to turn toward the front door when a man entered the room. The woman raised her head and smiled at the newcomer, who walked quickly across the room and, bending down, kissed her.

A gasp left the lips of the watcher outside. He took a step forward and, as he did so, the man inside the room sat down beside the woman and put an arm about her shoulders. Then he kissed her again.

A half cry came from David. He raised his hands before his face as

though to shut out the sight, and staggered backward. A yelp of pain came from the dog which was just behind him. David missed his footing and fell backward down the steps.

MONA HARRINGTON suddenly drew herself from her husband's embrace and sat upright.

"What was that?" she exclaimed.

"Sounded like the dog," he said.

"Caught a rat or something, I expect. You ought to get rid of the beast, you know, Mona. He's a nuisance."

"It was Arnold's," said the woman, looking at her husband reproachfully.

The man frowned and was about to say something when a long drawn howl came from outside the window.

"Damn that dog!" muttered the man.

Mona sprang to her feet and, running to the window, opened it and peered out. The dog came running toward her and dragged at her dress. Then, as her husband joined her, she caught sight of a still figure lying at the bottom of the steps.

"There's somebody there," she exclaimed, pointing. "Look, lying there by the——"

She did not finish but ran forward. Her husband followed swiftly.

The still figure by the steps was lying on its back, pale face turned to the stars. There was a dark stain on one cheek and a dark pool on the stone beneath the head.

"He must have fallen down the steps," whispered the man.

He fumbled for a box of matches. A moment later a spurt of flame lit the darkness, and husband and wife bent over the body.

"He's dead," breathed the man fearfully noting the staring eyes.

Then an awful scream came from his wife, and she sprang to her feet and staggered backward.

"Oh, my God!" she cried. "It's Arnold!"

The House with the Five Doors

By JAMES W. BENNETT

THE house with the five doors interested Emerson from the moment he had heard of its grim history. Passing down the gray *hutung*, he had often seen the high expanse of brick walls and had imagined behind the barrier drowsy, vacant courtyards without echoes.

When his informant coupled the weird recital of its eccentricities with the news that the place might be rented, Emerson's interest became more personal.

Philip Emerson knew China, although he would have been the last person to boast of the fact. An American, tall, slightly gaunt, a bachelor in the early thirties, he had acquired varied knowledge of dialects and peoples. The past four years he had spent in Szechuan and Mongolia. Accompanied by two staunch, old Chinese servants, he had fearlessly penetrated the hinterland.

Now, he was stationed in Peking for a year to advise the Department of Frontier Provinces in the purchase of derricks, rigging and other oil paraphernalia. He desired the luxury of a home after his wanderings—his own home. He went immediately to the house with the five doors, fee-ed the caretaker and wandered through the place. Finding it decidedly to his satisfaction, he struck off across the city to interview the landlord.

The Chinese owner lived outside

the great city wall in the Chien Men Quarter. He masked any jubilation he may have felt at the prospect of renting under the gauze of urbane indifference. In the suave phrases of his Mandarin dialect, he demanded three months' extra rent, or "key money," and Emerson paid it on the spot. He extracted a year's lease and Emerson signed it. In fact, the American refused to bargain, since the rent was ridiculously low.

So magnanimous had Emerson shown himself that the landlord decided upon a policy of frankness.

"I think it best to tell you, highly illustrious sir, that you have signed a lease for a house that a few, a very few, people call 'haunted.'"

"Yes, Thrice Honorable," Emerson agreed, "I also have heard rumors. He who first told me of the house filled my ears unto weariness. If the Pre-born would deign to advise me as to the exact nature of the haunting——?"

"I have never lived there and do not speak from experience," the Chinese answered cautiously. "But, the house is presumed to attract evil spirits. This, because it possesses five doors. Perhaps you will ask: 'Why do I not cut a sixth door?' Yet, to do that—well, such an act is said to anger the demons intensely. You thus show that you are dissatisfied with them." He shrugged silk-clad shoulders. "Besides, I am a poor man. There is the expense of knock-

ing out a wall to be considered. Also the sixth door would spoil the present symmetry."

"I understand," replied Emerson quickly. "The house doesn't need any more doors."

"I am glad you agree, exalted sir. Then, there is another thing I think had better be told: The last tenant——"

"Yes, I know," Emerson broke in with a touch of curt disdain. "My friend informed me. Your last renter lost his nerve and forfeited the lease."

"And you, illustrious, are above such fear?" A satiric note was etched in the placid voice.

EMERSON was thoughtful as he rikishaed back that afternoon through the Chien Men Gate. Across his mind repeatedly darted the query: "What was the matter with the house?" It was located in an excellent neighborhood. True, directly behind it were a few small obnoxious hovels, since that was one of the peculiarities of real estate in China's capital.

On the right, however, lay the dwelling of Admiral Tsen with its three hundred *chien* of rooms, its rockery and its dragon-bowl fountain. The Admiral, it appeared, rested under a grave suspicion of having murdered a curious and presumptuous daughter. She had gazed over the dividing wall into the courtyard of the house with the five doors and had carried on an indiscreet eye-to-eye flirtation with the former Chinese tenant.

Admiral Tsen had declared stoutly that she had been struck down by heaven one moonlight night when thus occupied; that she had been stricken for her sins, and therefore was no daughter of his. This diagnosis Emerson translated as *heart failure*. He had dealings with the

Admiral in naval oil, and he was loath to credit the man with murder.

But, to make the coincidence more damning, Emerson had learned of the indisputable tragedy rendering tenantless the dwelling on his left. This was a residence a young British exporter had acquired. He had been an excellent horseman, a member of the Peking Hunt.

Yet, riding home the preceding summer on the gentlest of his Manchurian mounts, he had been thrown and killed. Passing the house with the five doors, the pony had suddenly grown mad, screaming with terror.

No one knew what had frightened it—among the foreigners, at least. The Chinese house-boys and *amahs* of the quarter held small doubts in the matter. "The house has five doors!" they whispered among themselves.

BEFORE returning to the hotel that afternoon, Emerson decided to have another look at this newly acquired dwelling. As he rikishaed along the high brick wall to the door, for the first time the thoughtful expression was replaced by a smile.

The great double gate was lacquered a rich vermilion. Protecting the entrance from intrusion of vagrant demons stood a tall, spirit screen, dragon-carved in blackwood. Beyond, the oleanders of the courtyard were suave with bloom. Wisteria from a side wall raised feathery plumes of spray to the warm afternoon sun. A large catalpa tree cast a dappled shadow.

Around the court stood the four small dwelling houses, fragile façades of scarlet lattice-work and Korean parchment. Unconnected, one with another, each building had a door that opened on the central courtyard. The lacquered entrance gate made the fifth door.

"There you are!" Emerson muttered. "All five!" he laughed. "At-

tracting every itinerant ghost in North China, I suppose!"

He turned and entered the apartment across the court from the *hutung* and away from its noises. It was divided by a partition into two rooms. Standing in the larger of these, he decided that it would be his *study*. Here he would place his easy-chair and reading lamp, and here his books. The next room... that would do nicely for his laboratory. As soon as possible, he must have gas pipes in for his bunsen burners.

Suddenly the half smile on his face died. From the next room came a queer, soft, sliding sound. He listened for an instant only slightly startled. Then, as if some inner censor were giving occult warning, a chill crawled across his shoulders and nestled in his hair. "Swisssh! Swisssh! Swisssh!" went the sound.

"Damn fool!" Emerson muttered and tried to stimulate into action muscles grown peculiarly laggard. Before he could make the dozen steps necessary to reach the other room, there came a very unghostly succession of thumps, followed by a sharp noise, as though a whip had been cracked. After that—silence.

He peered into the next room. It was empty. He feared that it would be. That was more eerie than some wraith, materializing as a sneak thief, trapped, and ready to show fight.

"Now," said Emerson to himself, "there is something queer here. I'm not given to self-hypnosis. The sounds I heard were real. I didn't imagine them. The history of the house indicates——" This mental monologue, so habitual with lonely men, broke off as he began to examine the room.

BUILT after the Chinese fashion, two walls were of solid masonry, unpierced by windows. The third or

partition wall, except for the living-room doorway, was equally solid. Only the fourth dimension, facing on the courtyard, was broken by the lattice-work of parchment windows. There was no outside door, the entrance to the *study* doing service for both rooms.

It hardly seemed plausible, yet the intruder might have entered and left by one of these windows. Emerson tried them. They were tightly closed and bolted; the wood, having swollen with the summer rains, made the task of opening them difficult. After a moment he swung them wide and peered suspiciously about the courtyard.

A shadow cast by the catalpa tree moved for an agitated second. Emerson started. "Nerves!" he whispered disgustedly. A light wind had arisen. The catalpa swayed softly to its stimulus. Softly the oleanders danced to its chiming rhythm. Emerson shook his head in complete puzzlement and closed the windows.

He now examined the room. The flooring was of hard, packed clay. Over this he would spread, first, matting, and then a thick Tientsin rug. Next, the walls. Two were perfectly smooth. From floor to ceiling, the gray-white Chinese plaster was unbroken. The third, the back wall, was in need of repair. The plaster near the floor had dropped off, the bricks showing through. Emerson made a mental note of this. He must speak to the landlord and ask to have it renewed.

Evening was now sinking slumbrously about him, the room in harsh shadows. A sudden distaste for the whole venture swept across his soul. A desire to get away from the house came with imperative suddenness. He knew *then* that he had been more shaken by the strange, unnamable sound than he had at first realized.

AS Emerson rode across the city, a few days later, a thin sheet of fine, impalpable dust stirred under the feet of his rickshaw puller and robed the *hutungs* in diaphanous cloth-of-gold. He whistled as he went, eyes alight with anticipation. At the Chien Men Station, he hurried to the third class exit gates to meet the Shanghai train. Already seventeen hours late, it was at last due, according to report. Nevertheless, he stood for more than an hour among a group of patient Chinese.

Finally he was rewarded by the puffing entrance of the train hurling quantities of cinders. Amidst the excited, milling crowd of passengers that debouched, he caught sight of two old Chinese. Both were stooped, pock-marked and incredibly dirty. Each carried a bag of bedding and a hooded bird-cage. Their faces broke into smiles.

"Hello, Ginger! Hello, Cookie!"

The three stood looking at one another, bound together by the homely ties of services given and received through more than a decade.

Emerson turned to the thinner of the two, a man singularly tall for a South Chinese. "Boy, I've brought you and Cookie up here apparently to get you into trouble. It seems that I've rented a ghost house."

"Master is joking!" answered Ginger, the number-one boy.

"Master is still making pleasure with us because we had a spirit screen put before our door in Shanghai," answered the cook.

"Well, it isn't much of a joke, here. But now, pick up your kit and your bird-cages. Tomorrow I am moving into the new house. The furniture, except for your kitchen things and your beds, is already in the place. I'll give you some money. You can buy what you need tonight, Cookie, and sleep at the house. But, speaking of

spirit screens, there is one, just behind the entrance gates."

"Then all should be well," declared the cook positively.

"So it should," Emerson replied, thrusting his voice into the groove of indifference. He had given his servants warning. There could be no advantage now in enlarging upon the matter.

He was glad, nevertheless, that he had his own men with him. They had shown an unusual quality of bravery upon more than one occasion. They were genuinely attached to him. He had once nursed them both through cholera. He had crammed medicated mud down their throats and had shot saline solutions into them. Yes, he was glad, now, to have them with him.

THE EVENING Emerson moved in, all was still. Waiting in the courtyard for the call to dinner, he was soothed and dimly fortified by the distant noises made by the cook in the kitchen and by the soft footsteps of the boy in the room behind him. Ginger was swiftly bringing order out of the chaos that was the natural concomitant of moving.

Soon, dinner was announced, and Emerson entered the dining room. Mandarin fish, a roasted Chihli pheasant and an excellent curry brought him to the state of mind where he was almost willing to laugh at the house and its idiosyncrasies. Deftly, Ginger poured the coffee. He clipped the end of a long Sumatran cheroot and stood before Emerson with match lighted and poised. But the cigar was not ignited.

"Hieeeee!" came a distant yell. A small figure scuttled across the court. "Hell-damn!" shouted the cook, rushing into the dining-room without pretense of ceremony. The old fellow drew up before Emerson, shaking. The kitchen had been warm and the cook's torso was bare. The well-

larded ribs were rising and falling with telltale speed. His face was pale. He burst into excited Chinese, speaking so fast that Emerson had difficulty in following.

"I no stay! I go home! The house here is bad! It has the curse upon it of the *Nien-wang*, the Kings of Hell! It is wrong for me to stay! The gods do not wish it! Why should one anger the gods needlessly? I am old! It is not that I mind going to my Home of Peaceful Longevity! I have already bought it! It is of blackwood, lacquered with gold! But first I must make a pilgrimage to my ancestral home! I must go to the house of my father and burn incense! I must burn ingots of paper *sycee* to the angry demons! Perhaps they are sending me this as a warning because I have not burned more. I do not like this house! This house is bad!"

"For heaven's sake, Cookie, hold up!" Emerson at last managed to interrupt. "What's happened? And what is this you say about dying and going to your Home of Peaceful Longevity? . . . Take it slow! My Chinese isn't of the first order, you know."

"Very well, Master, I shall tell you slowly and with great distinctness. I am old. I am wicked. Just now, as I did bend over my cook-fire, I heard a strange sound. It went this way, 'Swisssh! Swisssh!' exactly as murmur the ghosts who cross the hillsides where the *Feng-shui* are bad, and graves should *not* be planted! Then my kitchen table moved! By the soul of my grandfather, who was a famous man in our land, before he lost his money—by the soul of my revered grandparent, I swear that the table moved!

"Then I heard a thumping! Next came a sharp sound, as of a fire-cracker. *That* was the signal of the chief of all the demons. He was clapping his hands together to call away

the spirits that surrounded me. In proof of this, from the moment of that crackling noise all was still. His signal saved me!"

Emerson turned to the boy. He knew that Ginger, the more clever of the two men, was by the same token the less superstitious. "Boy, do you think we've had ghostly visitors?"

The face which turned to Emerson expressed complete agreement with the cook. "What *could* it be, master, but spirits of evil? You may laugh, but I have seen many strange things in my life.

"Once, when I was young, I was number-two boy in a house with five doors. I would hear footsteps in another room, but, when I opened the door, no one would be there. I have had my blood frozen by weird laughter that came from the empty air. My ears in the night, as I crossed the courtyard, have been buffeted by ghostly hands. Even the wind bells in the eaves, at that house, used to ring, although there was no breeze to move them . . . As for this house here, possibly it was once a temple. Perhaps some old Buddha buried underground stirs in anger.

"Oh, hold up, boy," sighed Emerson. "You're worse than cookie. But, have you actually heard anything so far?"

"Why, yes, master! The same voice as my brother here. After we moved in last night, it came. My brother was asleep. He was very tired. I heard it alone. I was not afraid."

"So, it didn't frighten you, eh?"

Ginger hesitated and gave an embarrassed glance. "Y-yes," he replied haltingly. "I was afraid. I did not speak the truth. What I meant to say was that I shall not leave you because of my fear, nor will the cook, when he——" The boy's mouth closed tightly. He shrugged.

"When he's gotten over being frightened?"

"I am not frightened, Master!" spoke up the cook, nettled by the accusation. "But, no man should be asked to struggle with demons. This is a house with five doors. I have received my warning. Before another moon has waxed and waned, someone in this dwelling will have entered his Long Home. That I know."

"You think so? Just how, Cookie, do you reach *that* conclusion?"

"The geomancers, the blind soothsayers, the Taoist monks, all will tell you! The demons warn one first. This has been a warning. Then . . . Then . . ." He hesitated. "I do not like to speak of it, master; it was given me in confidence by the caretaker of this house. He, by the way, would not sleep here. He related to me that the number-one boy was found in the morning . . ." The cook's voice had grown very low. He glanced around as though afraid of spirit eavesdroppers. "He was found to have gone—on a long journey."

Emerson nodded. By the inflection of the cook's voice, he was able to catch the allusion. "How was this man forced to take his journey?"

"He was found lying in the courtyard here. There were great marks on his throat."

"Strangled?"

"How do I know, master? And, I repeat, before another moon has——"

"All right!" Emerson interrupted. "I understand. You wish to leave me. I don't blame you. I can hardly ask any servant to stay, under such conditions."

"The cook will not leave!" It was the boy who now interrupted. He spoke in a level, passionless tone. "Nor do I think my brother really wants to go." Ginger hesitated, then continued with a trace of wistfulness: "Unless—unless you are will-

ing, master, that we should all three move out?"

EMERSON eyed him for a moment without speaking. Was it fair to ask these two faithful men to stay, both of them afraid, their minds haunted with the fear of demons? yet, he had this house on his hands. The pay of the Chinese government was not munificent, and he could not easily bear the double expense of renting a second house. Except for this veiled, inexplicable menace, the dwelling suited him perfectly.

When he spoke, his tone was measured: "Now, listen well, both of you. I shall stay here alone tonight. I shall remain awake. If I hear the noise again I shall try to discover what is causing it. Once I find that cause, believe me, I can put a stop to it forever. Possibly it may mean shooting some evil-intentioned thief full of holes. The house has been empty for more than a year, and there may lay our answer, a thieves' rendezvous. Or, it may be that some man has a grudge against our landlord, some man who frightens away every tenant, so that no one will dare live in the house.

"You both will come back early tomorrow morning. If I haven't solved the puzzle, I'll put you on guard, during the forenoon, while I get some sleep. The ghosts are never supposed to be so active in their morning hours. Tomorrow night I shall again watch alone. And I shall keep on watching until I have gotten to the bottom of this. I shall not ask you, either of you, to take any more risks than necessary. Is that *hao? Hao-buhao?*"

The two men looked at him, faces imperturbable. Yet, beneath, Emerson saw the leaven of some agitation working. He knew the Chinese to be the most emotional race in the world.

"The master will remain here alone tonight?" asked the cook softly.

"Yes."

"And tomorrow night?"

"Yes, if I don't solve the riddle before that time."

"But despite what I have said to warn him?"

"Yes."

The mask of imperturbability was riven. Tears suddenly stood in the faded old eyes of the cook. "I was a dog to say that I would, that I even wanted to go. If the master stays, I stay. I owe my life to him."

"But, dammit, you old idiot," shouted Emerson angrily, "haven't I just said that I didn't want you to stay?" A lump had risen in his own throat. They had no right to harrow him in this sudden way with their loyalty, these two lovable old pirates who protected him on one hand and mulcted him on the other. "Out you go! Quick! No, wait! I suppose you'd better put away the silver first. I don't know how predatory Peking ghosts are. Yes, finish that up first and then go."

THE two servants bowed without speaking further and departed for the kitchen. Emerson, his eyes thoughtful, went into his bedroom and took from a trunk an old service revolver. He twirled the loaded cylinder and rubbed away a bit of the oil with which it had been bathed to combat the damp of a past excursion in the Yangtse Valley. Slipping the weapon into his coat pocket, he moved to the courtyard. There was no moon. Brilliant stars sharply pierced the blackness. It was as though some vast curtain of sable velvet had grown old and threadbare and was giving through it the light from a gigantic illumination just beyond its folds.

From the kitchen suddenly came a long-drawn, *banshee* wail. "What

the——!" ejaculated Emerson. Then he smiled. The smile emerged into a chuckle. "A Chinese fiddle! After all these years! I didn't know either of them played." The chuckle faded as a new thought replaced his wonderment. "I wonder if the music is to exorcise demons!" He walked to the kitchen door and peered in.

Bent over a two-stringed instrument, with the bow threaded inside and pulled out, Chinese fashion, instead of pressed down, Ginger was making doleful melody. He stopped at the sight of Emerson and gave an embarrassed glance.

"Very good, boy. But I didn't know you played one of those. All these years, too!"

"I do not play much, *sien sung*. Only if—if cares oppress me."

Emerson nodded. His conjecture about the exorcising power of music, he decided, had been close to the mark.

"I am only making the music now," the boy elaborated, "while I wait for my brother to finish. On our trips into the back-country, it was not easy to carry one of these; a little fall, and they break."

"Yes, I would imagine so." To Emerson's mind floated the vision of mountain trails, of his two servants staggering under the weight of his bedding, food and geologist's gear. "Let me see your fiddle."

Ginger handed it over. It was a short-necked affair. The wooden sound box was the size and dimension of a fruit tin. Over the open face and back of this was spread a bit of python skin to give it resonance. The skin seemed freshly tanned and gave off a slightly musty, disagreeable odor.

Emerson returned the instrument. "Your python has been badly dressed. Where did you buy the fiddle? In Shanghai?"

"No, master, here in Peking. Every

city has its shops that make these, if you will remember. There is a small place just back of the house here. I bought this fiddle there. I paid eighty coppers."

"Music isn't dear in China, is it?" Then, turning to the cook: "Nearly through?"

"Just now can do, master," answered the cook, dropping into pidgin-English, as was occasionally his habit.

"Come on, then. Here's a dollar each. You go to a good Chinese hotel. Get yourselves good rooms."

Both gazed at Emerson queerly, he thought. Ginger replied:

"We shall not take the money. We—we have friends. We shall stay with them."

"You are both ruddy liars!" Emerson pronounced dispassionately. "Neither of you have any friends this side of Hankow. You've told me so. And it's the first time I've ever known you to refuse money!" He shook his head in puzzlement.

"But we have found many *dear* friends now!" argued the cook.

"Oh, all right, all right; if you don't want the money, run along! All I can say is, there's something fishy about this."

The servants made no reply but walked slowly to the gate. There, they both turned and looked appealingly at Emerson.

"No!" he answered their gaze firmly. "Out you go. I'm seeing this thing through alone."

They bowed farewell. Emerson waited at the door until their two dim forms had been swallowed by the engulfing maw of darkness. Despite his firm tone, there rose in him a desire that was almost overwhelming to call them back. The darkened areas of the courtyard behind him seemed now to hold a hundred shadowed menaces.

Then with a short, dry laugh at his

fears, Emerson thrust into place the great wooden crossbar. He looked at his watch. Ten o'clock. The long night's vigil was beginning.

THE moments crept oppressively by, a slow drag of interminable time. Spaces of peering into the blackness, of fancying noises, of raising futile alarms. Through it all came onslaughts of a queer loneliness. It was a nostalgia such as he had never known on camp or trail.

Shortly before midnight, he heard sounds, soft, scratching sounds. Contrary to his suspicious expectation, they did not come from the direction of the half-fitted laboratory, nor from the kitchen farther along, that abutted onto the same back wall.

The noises continued. Emerson's lips wrinkled. He caught the revolver from his pocket and stole toward the soft, furtive sound in the direction of the entrance door.

"Now," he whispered to himself, "now we'll see what's causing all this! If the house has been a roost for some member of the Beggars' Guild, he'll not use it again!"

Softly Emerson tiptoed to the spirit screen shielding the entrance. He poked his head around. Dimly, very dimly, he could distinguish a form perched on top of the street wall. It was engaged at the moment in attempting without appreciable success to haul up, from the lane outside, another form. Both were grunting softly.

Emerson raised his gun. Should he give warning? If he did, the marauder might quietly slide down the wall, into the lane, and away. The mystery would remain only partially solved. On the other hand, wasn't it a bit like pot-shooting? He wasn't giving this all-too-solid ghost a fair show. His heart was pounding and the pointed gun barrel was none too steady. He decided to speak.

"Who are you? Don't try to escape or I'll shoot!"

From the wall came a startled movement, followed by a familiar voice: "Oh, hell-damn! Hell-damn! *E-mo Lan yay* (honorable Emerson), don't shoot!"

"Cookie!" Emerson leaned back giddily, weakly. "You purblind idiot! Do you know the chances you were running just now! Come on down from that wall, you blinking owl, you . . . Is Ginger outside?"

The cook nodded sheepishly. "It is very hard to climb your wall, master!"

"That proves our family ghost is not a senile, doddering man, who has quite lost his wits!"

With hands that were shaking, in reaction now, Emerson drew back the great wooden crossbar of the gate. Outside, meekly rubbing his nose, stood the boy.

"Well, one of you, tell me what *this* means? Quick about it!"

Both shrugged and maintained an obstinate silence.

"Come in, then. So you didn't find your—your friends at home?" Emerson relented far enough to give them this opportunity of saving face.

They pounced upon it. Ginger spoke with palpable relief.

"Yes, master, that was it!"

The cook, ever the more mendacious, took up the burden. "Our friends have gone to the country to assist their grandmother to enter her Long Home."

Emerson laughed. Then he laughed again. "My humor is not because of the burial of your friends' grandmother," he explained. "I am thinking how eternally funny you looked, Cookie, sitting like a beruffled bird on top of that wall. So this is why you wouldn't take the hotel money, eh? You planned all the time to come back. Oh, well! What's the use! I—I'm mighty glad to see you both!"

"Does the master——?" began Ginger hesitatingly and then stopped, his eyes inquiring.

"Yes, you can stay. I won't turn you out again. Now crawl into your quarters. By the way, no ghost has appeared yet."

"They—they sometimes appear," said Ginger seriously, "at the Hour of the Tiger, three o'clock by your time."

"Is this right?" Emerson smiled. "Thoughtful of 'em! I shall look forward to the visit. You're sure I can expect them at that hour?"

The boy ignored the question. It was plain that he thought the master's levity ill-timed.

"Well," Emerson went on, "by the beard of your prophet, Kong Fu-tzu, we'll give 'em a rousing welcome. If I shout, you both come running. I'm going to change my tactics and wander into my laboratory now. That was the place where I heard the sounds first. And it was along that wall where you and Cookie heard it, too. I'm beginning to think it is some sort of echo; possibly it came from the other side of the wall. If you stop to think about it, we've never actually seen anything here in this compound. We've only heard noises."

"My kitchen table moved!" interposed the cook with some asperity.

"That might have been your imagination."

"But, master," interposed Ginger in turn, "how about the number-one boy who was found here? And the young woman next door, the Admiral's daughter? And the man who was thrown from his horse?"

AGAIN the house and courtyard were silent. Emerson seated himself in a comfortable wicker chair that he had carried into the laboratory from his living-room. He had found himself growing drowsy in reaction from the keyed-up moments when he had

watched that dim form straddling the wall beside the entrance gate.

The drowsiness moved into nodding sleep, and from cat-naps he sank into genuine slumber. Three o'clock, the hour of the Tiger, drew near. A cock crowed and then another.

Into the room crept a scratching sound, a sinister, scraping, swish-swishing noise. Then, not far distant but muffled, a man's voice softly grumbling, followed by a sharp crack, as of a whip. The swishing stopped and then continued again in another part of the room. This disconcerted succession of noises went on for some seconds, the breaks of silence growing less and less, until, at last, the room seemed sibilantly clamorous.

Something hard and cold, dreadfully repellant, crept upon Emerson, a second thing, a third. He awoke with a start, awoke fighting, every sensory nerve wildly jangling. He did not call out; for the moment he could not.

In the dimness of the room he distinguished writhing forms. Crawling things! Loathesome! Huge snakes! Pythons!

A brick in the wall, near the floor where the plaster had been chipped away, now was pushed back. Through this orifice, from the outside, came the swift slide of scaly bellies. He was in a nest of constrictor snakes. They closed about his arms, his head, his neck. His revolver might still be in the trunk for all the power he had to reach it. A revoltingly thick, ever-tightening body was closing about his throat. Struggle furiously as he might, he could not loosen it. A red film came over his eyes.

For the first time came the urge to shout for help. "Boy!" he called hoarsely. "Cook!" The cry was scarcely loud enough to be heard outside the room.

Yet, a moment later, the door rattled and was torn open. Emerson dimly sensed that the two servants

must have been standing anxious guard in the courtyard.

The snakes were not full grown, yet there seemed an inordinate number of them. The boy and the cook both were armed with sticks. They freed the constrictor's grip about Emerson's neck and arms, after a sharp struggle. They struck out then in grim silence at the hissing, infuriated serpents. At last the three men managed to beat their way free into the study and thence to the courtyard, shutting the door behind them.

"Ginger, what in God's name——" Emerson began; but the boy roughly clapped a hand over his master's mouth.

"Shussssh! Wait, sir!" Ginger's voice was scarcely higher than a breathing whisper. "I begin to understand. I've heard of this sort of thing before. It isn't new to China."

The cook nodded his head slowly. "I, too, remember, master. It was in the city where we were born, the Black Inn at Kashing."

"Exactly!" concurred the boy. "The Black Inn."

There came the cracking snap of a whip in the distance, beyond the rear wall. The sliding, scraping noises inside the laboratory grew greater for a moment and then died away.

"We should find the room empty, now, master," Ginger whispered. Then he unexpectedly added, "I think we should go back in there."

"What? Go back?"

"Yes. We will be safer there than if we stayed out here. Of course, if it is your wish that we remain in this courtyard——?"

EMERSON stared at Ginger for a bleak, indecisive moment. He was afraid. He had never been so shaken in his life. Primitive, snake-fearing, darkness-hating nerves cried out imperative warnings. But his servants had both evidently recognized this at-

tack as belonging to some malign plan that was not too unusual in China. Therefore, he took his courage in both hands. Brushing past cook and boy, he entered first. His servants followed, seemingly as cool as a pair of their fabulous stage warriors.

In the study all was still. Emerson lighted a match. Cupping its flame in his hands, he went into the laboratory. That room also was empty. The floor was littered with broken retorts, test tubes and glass jars that had been shivered in the struggle. They constituted the only witness that this had not been an evil dream.

The pythons had come from the hovels that abutted the house at the back; that much was clear. But how? Emerson struck a second match. The bricks at the base of the wall seemed solid enough to the eye.

Ginger, peering over Emerson's shoulder, pointed to one; it was loose. The latter reached down to move it, but the boy caught at his wrist.

"Wait, master," Ginger mouthed with infinite caution. "We want no more snakes. The game will be played differently now. The ordeal will be worse, if it should be what we think."

Emerson choked back an insane desire to laugh. Nothing that existed in the wide, wide world could possibly be worse.

Neither the boy nor cook spoke further. Moments lengthened. The darkness drooped down over them with choking folds. Emerson listened for sounds until his ears were aching with the strain. Then, when he was convinced that he could stand the inaction no longer, he heard the stealthy, slow creep of footsteps crossing the courtyard. Many footsteps. Again the muscles crawled at the base of his neck. The sounds were eerie, this ghostlike, approaching patter. He detected, rather than saw, the cook take from his sash a weapon. Ginger, too, had stirred as though

preparing. Emerson slid his revolver from his pocket.

The tiptoeing footsteps moved slowly, hesitatingly toward the study door. The portal began to move, inch by inch. Emerson's eyes had become, to a degree, accustomed to this intense darkness. Therefore, when the door swung wide, he was able to distinguish the cluster of faces that suddenly peered in, intent, evil faces.

"Ey-yah!" the cook suddenly shouted and dove straight for the door. There was a startled movement about the entrance, curses in Chinese. The figures hovered there uncertainly, undecided whether to press on in or to break and run.

Emerson made the decision for them. He lifted his revolver ceilingward and fired twice. The detonation of the gun in the narrow confines of the study had a magical effect. The figures separated and went scurrying away in mad, clawing panic. After them went the two servants, with Emerson following on the latters' heels. As he reached the courtyard, he was vouchsafed the inspiring sight of his ancient and almost corpulent cook pursuing a tall marauder around the court at the point of a long kitchen knife. After a single tour *age* told; the pursuit flagged. The man, taking advantage of a few feet leeway, stopped at the gate. He gave an acrobatic leap and scrambled to the top. He howled in pain, however, as the cook, making a final spurt, jabbed him in the fleshy part of the calf before he could draw his leg over. Emerson speeded his progress by firing into the air after him.

The others quickly disappeared, utterly routed, over walls onto low roofs. The sight of a tall, active white man flourishing a revolver and letting it off at intervals, was too much for their stamina. It was plain

that they had neither expected nor prepared for any resistance.

THE three inmates at last gathered, panting, in the now emptied courtyard. Emerson spoke:

"Well, boys, this has been a *large* evening! Cookie, we didn't have to wait for the noon to wax and wane, did we?"

"No," answered the old fellow serenely. "Trouble all finish now. Tomorrow, I think many men will wander headless in the other world!"

"Good Lord, you didn't decapitate anyone with that kitchen knife of yours, did you?"

"No! No!" replied the cook with bloodthirsty regretfulness. "But the sound of the master's revolver will soon bring the police. I shall tell of these men. The police will catch them. Very clever at catching robbers are the Peking police."

"So I've heard. By the way, did you suspect? I mean, did you have some suspicion, and rig up all that story about ghosts?"

"No! Oh, no, master," protested the cook. "We would both have sworn by our ancestral spirit tablets that the house was demon-haunted. Only when we saw the snakes did we realize that we were being attacked by very bad men."

"Yes," spoke up Ginger. "It was then that we recalled the Black Inn at our native town, Kashing."

"What happened at Kashing?" asked Emerson.

"Near the Black Inn, master, was a shop where they raised pythons for

their skins; to put on the backs of the two-stringed fiddles and the larger-headed banjos that our blind musicians play so well. A gang of very bad men bought the little music shop at Kashing. They dug holes between it and the back rooms of the Inn. They made the snakes crawl through these holes."

"I see," interrupted Emerson. "So that's the answer. So, here, the trouble has nothing to do with the five doors of the house!"

"Ah, but the master is wrong! Here, it has had everything to do with them!"

Emerson looked up in surprise. "How?"

"Because houses with five doors are supposed to bring on evil spirits. These bad men were able to work without fear of being caught."

"I see, boy. The spirits gave them an alibi. The blame would be laid on some poor inoffensive ghost, no matter what happened."

Then he went on: "Blessed if I'm not beginning to understand how that poor girl in the Admiral's house next-door came to die. These fine citizens behind us probably strangled her, because she looked over and saw them. Or, perhaps it *was* heart failure, sticking her head up and finding, instead of her lover, a flock of pythons besporting themselves in the courtyard here. And, by Jove, probably one of the beastly serpents strayed out into the road and made that poor British Johnnie's horse shy him off to a broken neck!"

"The master is very wise," answered Ginger.





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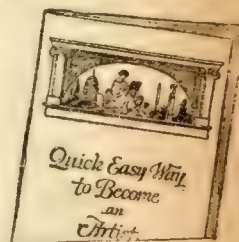
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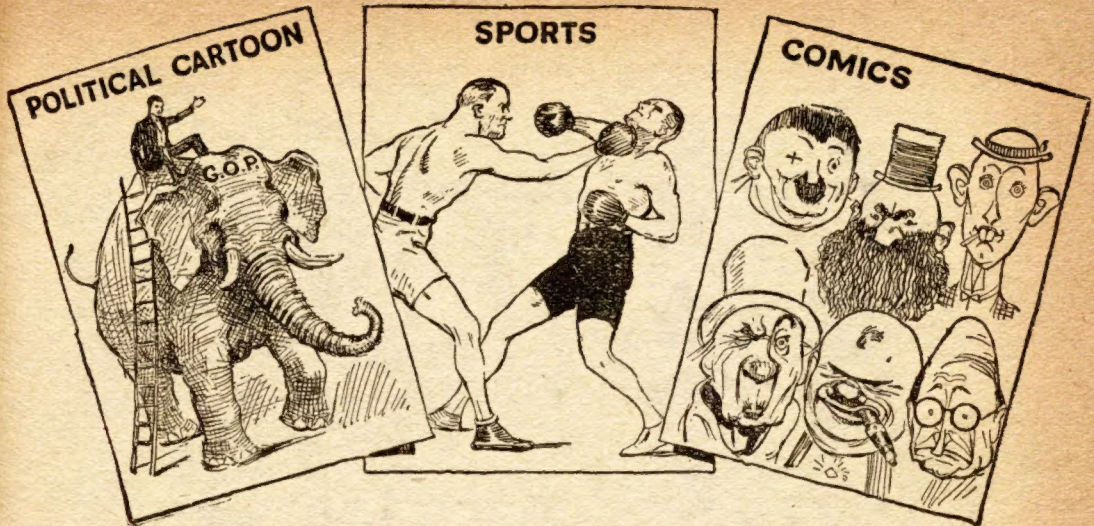
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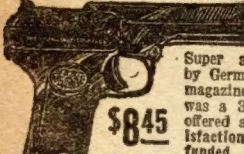
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I glanced from the booklet to my secretary. I felt my blood boiling. "Miss Harris," I said to her, "I can't say that I appreciate your sense of humor. Just what is your idea?"

She paled. "Why, Mr. Burns—what's wrong?"

"Wrong?" I shouted, "what's the idea of sending me this hint about my hair?"

Tears came into her eyes. And between sobs she explained why it wasn't her fault.

She said the coupon I asked her to mail had another coupon printed on the back—and the other coupon offered to send a free book about baldness. Well, she simply used her own judgment!

"Hm," was all I could say.

That night on my way home I read the book about baldness. It described an entirely new method of making hair grow—perfected by Alois Merke, founder of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York. It is the only treatment I ever heard of that reached right down to the hair roots and awakened them.

As I read on I felt myself weakening in my resolve not to try another hair treatment. And then when I read that Merke actually guaranteed a new growth of hair in 30 days or no cost—well, I sent for the treatment.

The first two or three days, nothing happened.

But a week or so later when I looked in the mirror I saw something that almost bowled me over! For there, just breaking through, was a fine downy fuzz all over my head.

Every day this young hair kept getting stronger. At the end of a month you could hardly see a bald spot. And at the end of sixty days—well, my worries were ended. For I had regained an entirely new growth of hair.

Here's the Secret

According to Alois Merke, in most baldness the hair roots are not dead, but merely dormant. Now to make a sickly tree grow you would not rub "growing



fluid" on the leaves. Yet that is what I had been doing, when I used to douse my head with ordinary tonics, salves, etc. To make a tree grow you must nourish the roots. That's exactly what the Merke treatment does.

At the Merke Institute many have paid as high as \$500 for results secured. Now these same results may be secured in any home where there is electricity—for a few cents a day.

Merke admits that his treatment will not grow hair in every case. There are some cases of baldness that nothing can help. But so many have regained hair this new way, that Merke invites you to try the treatment 30 days at his risk, and if it fails, to grow hair then the trial is free. Your money is instantly refunded. You are the sole judge.

Coupon Brings You Full Details

This story is typical of the results that people are securing with the Merke Treatment.

"The New Way to Make Hair Grow," is a 34-page book which will be sent you entirely free if you mail the coupon below. This book tells all about the new treatment, shows what it has done for others, and contains much valuable information on the care of the hair. Remember, this book is yours free. And if you decide to take the treatment, you don't risk a penny. So mail coupon now. Address Allied Merke Institute, Inc., Dept. 1552, 512 Fifth Ave., New York.



Get This Free Book

Allied Merke Institute, Inc.
Dept. 1552, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Please send me—without cost or obligation, in a plain wrapper, a copy of your book describing the Merke System.

Name (State whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss)

Address

City State

Read This

"My hair was coming out at an alarming rate, but after four or five treatments I noticed this was checked. My hair is coming in thicker and looks and feels full of life and vigor."—W. C., Great Neck, N. Y.

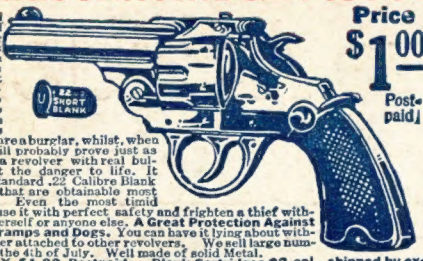
"I have used your system for eight weeks and although the top of my head has been entirely bald for six years, the results up to the present are gratifying. In fact, the entire bald spot is covered with a fine growth of hair."—W. B., Kenmore, Ohio.

(Original of above letters on file at the Institute.)

BLANK CARTRIDGE PISTOL

This well made and effective Pistol is modeled on the pattern of the latest type of Revolver, the appearance of which alone is enough to scare a burglar, whilst, when loaded, it will probably prove just as effective as a revolver with real bullets, without the danger to life. It takes the standard .22 Calibre Blank Cartridges, that are obtainable most everywhere. Even the most timid women can use it with perfect safety and frighten a thief without risk to herself or anyone else. A Great Protection Against Burglars, Tramps and Dogs. You can have it lying about without the danger attached to other revolvers. We sell large numbers around the 4th of July. Well made of solid Metal.

PRICE ONLY \$1.00 Postpaid. Blank Cartridges .22-cal., shipped by express only, 50c per 100. Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 489, Racine, Wis.



Price
\$1.00
Postpaid

Sneezing Powder



Place a very small amount of this powder on the back of your hand and blow it into the air, and everyone in the room or car will begin to sneeze without knowing the reason why. It is most amusing to hear their remarks, as they never suspect the source, but think they have caught it from the other. Between the laughing and sneezing you yourself will be having the time of your life. For parties, political meetings, car rides, or any place at all where there is a gathering of people, it is the greatest joke ever. Price 10c or 3 for 25c

Mystic Skeleton

A jointed figure 10c pd. Place a skeleton in, in height, will dance to music and perform various gyrations and movements while the operator may be some distance from it.



Serpent's Eggs

Box contains 12 eggs. When lit with a match, each one gradually hatches itself into a snake 6 or 8 inches long, with 100 curls and twists about in a most lifelike manner. Price per box 10c pd.



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THE VENTRILLO

a little instrument, fits in the mouth out of sight, used with above for Bird Calls, etc. Anyone can use it.



Never Fails. A 32-page book on ventriloquism, and the Ventrilo, ALL FOR 10c postpaid.



ITCHING POWDER

This is another good practical joke; the intense discomfort of your victims to everyone but themselves is thoroughly enjoyable. All that is necessary to start the ball rolling is to deposit a little of the powder on a person's hand and the powder can be relied upon to do the rest. The result is a vigorous scratch, then some more scratch, and still some more.

10c box, 3 boxes for 25c or 75c per doz boxes postpaid.

Microphone Transmitter Button



You can easily make a highly sensitive detector by using this Transmitter Button to collect the sound waves. You can build your own outfit without buying expensive equipment. It is simple and inexpensive. You can install an outfit in your home and hear conversations being held all over the house. You can connect up different rooms of a hotel. This outfit was used by secret service agents during the war. It is being used on the stage. It is ultra-sensitive and is the greatest invention in micro-phones. You can mount the button almost anywhere—ward boxes, stove pipes, stiff calendars, on the wall behind a picture frame, etc. Button is so light and small it cannot be detected. Persons can be overheard without suspecting it. You can listen in on conversations in another room. A deaf person in the audience can hear the speaker. Connected to phonograph, piano or other musical instrument, music can be heard hundreds of feet away. Button may be used to renew telephone transmitters; often makes an old line "talk-up" when nothing else will. The ideal microphone for radio use; carries heavy current and is extremely sensitive. Amplifies radio signals. Countless other similar uses will suggest themselves. Experimenters find the button useful for hundreds of experiments along the lines of telephones, amplifiers, loud speakers, etc. Many fascinating stunts may be devised, such as holding the button against the throat or chest to reproduce speech without sound waves. \$5.00 is given to anyone who sends in a new suggestion for the use of the button providing the manufacturer find it suitable for use in their literature. PRICE \$1.00 POSTPAID ANYWHERE.

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JOHNSON SMITH & CO. Dept. Racine, Wis.

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The Wonder of the World

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MAGICIAN'S OUTFIT

Apparatus and Directions for a Number of Mysterious Tricks Enough for an Entire Evening's Entertainment

ANYONE CAN DO THEM 75c



It is great fun mystifying your friends. Get this Conjuror's Cabinet, and you will be the cleverest fellow in your district. It contains the apparatus for seven separate tricks, including the Disappearing Rose, that, when placed on the lapel of your coat, vanishes from sight at will; the Magic Van and Ball Trick (a Wooden Ball is placed inside, and upon replacing, the lid has disappeared and is found in someone else's pocket); the Magic Nail with which you can apparently cut your finger almost in two; the Wonderful Card Trick (a card is placed in an envelope, and when open an entirely different card is found); the Disappearing Coin Box (a coin is placed in the little wooden barrel, and when opened again, is found to have vanished entirely, or can be made to change into a coin of another denomination); the Famous Disappearing Penny Trick; the Glass Goblet and Vanishing Coin Trick (a coin is dropped into a glass of water, and when the water is poured out the coin has vanished). With the tricks described above we send full printed instructions for performing each trick, so that anyone can readily perform all the tricks to the great amusement of their friends or the public. Any boy of ordinary intelligence, with this Cabinet of Tricks in his possession, can give a party entertainment not inferior to some regular magicians. Besides the tricks contained in the Cabinet, there are many other facts and illusions fully explained with full printed instructions, for which you easily make or receive many more. An excellent Cabinet of Tricks for ONLY 75c. POSTPAID TO ANY ADDRESS.

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Most Sensational Trick of the Day!



With the Fire Eater in his possession any person can become a perfect salamander, apparently breathing fire and ejecting thousands of brilliant sparks from his mouth, to the horror and consternation of all beholders. Harmless fun for all times, seasons and places. If you wish to produce a decided sensation in your neighborhood don't fail to procure one. We send the Fire Eater with all the materials, in a handsome box, the cover of which is highly ornamented with illustrations in various colors. Price of all complete only 30 cents, postpaid.

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25c



A REAL STARTLER. This is the most popular of all squirt tricks. The flower in your coat looks so fresh and sweet that everyone is tempted to inhale the delightful perfume. Then is the moment to press the bulb. Geewh-like! Does it jump? There is a very long rubber tube that easily reaches to the pocket of your coat or trousers, and the bulb is large enough to make a dozen shots with one loading. PRICE 25c each, or 3 for 65c postpaid.

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Greatest boys' book written. Tells how to make a Pinhole Camera, a Cannon, model Railroad, a Telephone, Boomerang, Telegraph Instrument, Box Kite, Talking Machine, Microscope, Electric Motor, Electric Bell, Water Wheel, Paddle Raft, a pair of Skis, a Dog Sled, Bird House, Rabbit Yard, etc. 61 pages, 150 illustrations. PRICE, 10c postpaid; 3 for 25c.



GOLD TEETH

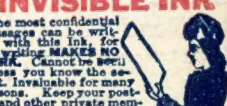
You know how fashionable it is to have gold crowns, if you can afford it. These gold-finished shells fasten over your real teeth and look like very wealthy fillings. Can be slipped on and off in an instant. Get some and surprise your friends. PRICE 6 Cents Each, 3 for 15c, or 50c for 1 doz. postpaid.

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It is made in the shape of a regular Automatic Pistol. No one is likely to stop and ask you whether it is real or not. Thus it is likely to prove itself very handy in an emergency. On pressing the trigger it opens up, as shown in the illustration at the right, revealing nine most useful articles: Opera and Field Glass, Telescope, Mirror, Magnifying Glass and Burning Lens, Reading Glass, Sun Dial, Sun Compass, etc. In the handle of the revolver there is a place for various pocket necessities, such as First Aid Articles, Talcum, Pins, etc. The Pistol is of solid metal, blade finish, that can be carried comfortably in pocket. PRICE \$1.00.

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